

A History of Northumberland Table Tennis Association
By Aubrey Drapkin

CHAPTER ONE

The Beginning

1931-1932

In the beginning a meeting of a small band of enthusiasts, none of whom had very much knowledge of the game, decided to introduce the sport to the district. Those pioneers were the convenors Mr. F.A.Constable and Mr. Ken Nicholson of Saint George's Presbyterian Church together with Miss D.M.Davidson of Saint George's Church of England, Mr.J.H.Jackman of Ministry of Labour, Mr.S.P.Brown of Evening World, Mr.Cook from Friends Meeting House, and Mr. N. Hudspith of Saint Stephen's Church of England. The convenors' nominee, the Reverend W.MacNichol had been unable to attend the meeting. Mr. Constable was elected to the chair and Mr.Nicholson was appointed as Acting Honorary Secretary.

A full discussion of all of the items on the agenda took place and the following proposals were adopted as recorded in the minutes of this Preliminary Meeting:

- 1.That a Table Tennis Association be formed in Newcastle, the question of affiliation to the English Table Tennis Association to be brought up at the first Annual General Meeting.
- 2.That the Acting Honorary Secretary obtain an exact estimate of the expenses to be incurred by the proposed Association in its first season.
- 3.That the subscription be five shillings (25p) for each Gentlemen's team entered by a club.
- 4.That a Ladies' Section of the Association be formed, and that there be an additional subscription of two shillings and sixpence (12.5p) for each Ladies' team entered by a club.
- 5.That the 'Tema' ball be approved for all Association matches; the indulgence of the meeting being, however, extended to the Ministry of Labour, who were desirous of using a heavier ball for all their home matches.
- 6.That a fixture list be prepared by the Acting Honorary Secretary, and submitted for confirmation at the next meeting; the following nights being stated as suitable to the respective clubs for their home matches:
 - a. St George's Church of England: Tuesdays and Saturday afternoons.
 - b. Ministry of Labour: Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays.
 - c. Evening World: Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays.
 - d. Friends' Meeting House: Mondays.
 - e. St.Stephen's Church of England: Tuesdays and Fridays.
 - f. St.George's Presbyterian Church of England: Mondays.
- 7 That five players constitute a team; that each player play two games of twenty-one points up, and in the event of the score twenty all being reached, the player who thereafter succeeds in obtaining a clear lead of two points to be the winner.

That matches be decided on aggregate points, two league points to be awarded for a win, and one league point for a draw.

8. That the question of liability to the English Table Tennis Association did not arise until the question of affiliation was decided.

9. That a suggested Exhibition Match by players of the Sunderland Association be deferred until a later date.

The representatives promised to acquaint their clubs with the proceedings, and to report their decisions at the next meeting to be held on 19th November, 1930.

This meeting, minuted as the Inaugural Meeting of the Association was duly held at 24 Nuns Moor Crescent, Fenham, Newcastle upon Tyne being the home of Mr. Ken Nicholson. with the same persons apart from Mr. Cook present and being joined by a Mr. T.H. Johnston.

At this meeting it was decided that the Association be called the Newcastle upon Tyne Table Tennis Association. Mr F.A. Constable was appointed as Chairman with Mr. J.H. Jackman as Vice-Chairman. Mr Ken Nicholson was appointed as Honorary Secretary and Treasurer. He was to hold the position of Treasurer until 1950.

Miss D.M. Davison and Mr. N. Hudspith were appointed as Honorary Auditors.

The proposals made at the preliminary meeting were agreed except that the Friends Meeting House intimated that it would not be possible for them to engage in any home fixtures at that juncture.

The estimated cost of buying the Books of the Association and of other necessary supplies was presented, the total cost being one pound thirteen shillings and three pence (£1.66p) which included the cost of Score Books. The purchase of all items except the last one was approved it being agreed that the Score Books should be provided by the clubs.

A letter had been received from the Secretary of the English Table Tennis Association regarding several points that had been raised at the previous meeting and the Honorary Secretary was instructed to reply thereto, stating that the question of affiliation would appear on the Agenda of the first Annual Meeting.

No formal rules and regulations were drawn up but it was agreed that in the event of any complaint arising as to the discourtesy or mismanagement on the part of any club, notice of such complaint should be sent by the Honorary Secretary of the Association to the Secretary of the alleged offending club. The minutes do not say, however, how any such matter was to be dealt with.

It was also decided that meetings of emergency could be convened on written notice being given to the Honorary Secretary, such notice to bear the signatures of at least four Club Secretaries and to be in the hands of the Honorary Secretary at least one week before the proposed date of the meeting. The Honorary Secretary was instructed to supply each Club Secretary with a list of names, addresses, and telephone numbers of all Club Secretaries.

So the very first season of competitive play got under way, albeit on a fairly relaxed basis with very few rules and regulations.

The men's section was made up of teams from the six clubs who had been represented at the Inaugural Meeting together with L & N.E.Railway Engineers whilst four teams, Saint George's Church of England, Friends Meeting House, Saint George's Presbyterian Church and Evening World competed in the Ladies Section.

Whilst no record was made of a committee being formed a summary of the first season was given at a committee meeting held on 6th May 1931 at which the chairman, who was also representing his club, the secretary and representatives of four other clubs were present. This meeting was also attended for part of the time by a Mr. Bart Kinnair who made an application for a team from Blyth Young Men's Christian Association to join the Association.

In view of the difficulties that had been encountered in the first season of the Association gratification was felt at the way in which all concerned had tried to carry out their obligations.

It also appeared that there was some misunderstanding as to whether the home or visiting team was responsible for the final arrangements for playing of matches and it was agreed that in future each club secretary communicate with the other by letter or telephone to confirm the final details.

The playing of ladies on gentlemen's teams created a lively discussion with the Vice Chairman proposing that this should not be allowed in future and being seconded by Miss Davidson. On the other hand, the Chairman spoke at length for the idea and moved an amendment that one lady be allowed to play on a gentlemen's team which received a seconder but was dropped on being put to the vote.

The very first champions of the Gentlemen's Section of the League were Ministry of Labour who completed the season without being beaten although there is no record as to whether or not they did indeed use the heavier ball. L.N.E.R. Engineers were the runners up. Saint George's Presbyterian Church were victorious in the Ladies Section with Evening World the runners up.

The first Ordinary General Meeting, as it was called, was held on **2nd September 1931** when the retiring Officers, F.A. Constable (Chairman), J.H.Jackman (Vice Chairman), Ken A.Nicholson (Honorary Secretary and Treasurer) were all re-elected and Mr.Bart Kinnair was appointed as a second Vice Chairman. This was to be the start of a long involvement with the Association by Bart Kinnair who was appointed as Chairman in the following year, a position he held until the end of the 1954/55 season after which he was President up to and including 1985/86.

It was agreed that the 'Tema' ball, match weight would be the ball to be used in all league matches and that Mr. Stan Seymour, the former Newcastle United footballer who had a Sports Goods business in Market Street in Newcastle, be asked to supply these.

The first Receipts and Payments Account of the Association was approved which showed income of £2.5.00 (£2.25) and expenditure of £1.9.6 (£1.47)

The production of a printed handbook was discussed and left in the hands of a Mr. Oakley and the Honorary Secretary.

However, the major item was the adoption of a complete set of rules which had been prepared by Mr. Ken Nicholson, the first of which stated that the Association would be called the

Northumberland Table Tennis Association and would be affiliated to the English Table Tennis Association.

The object of the Association was to administer and to advance the interests of the game in Newcastle upon Tyne and the County of Northumberland and the Association would consist of individual players residing within, and bona-fide Table Tennis Clubs playing within these areas.

The Association was to be divided into such district Leagues or other divisions as deemed necessary.

The subscriptions (including the fee to the English Table Tennis Association) was five shillings (25p) in respect of each club together with an additional two and six pence (12.5p) in respect of each team entered by such club. The registration fee for individual players was one shilling and sixpence (7.5p) but would not confer voting rights at meetings.

Any club that did not pay the current subscription by the date of the first committee meeting to be held in the second week in September would be deemed to have withdrawn.

The voting rights at each meeting of the Association were to be that each club in membership had one vote only.

The financial year end was to be 31st March and a statement of income and expenditure to be circulated with the Agenda for the Annual General Meeting.

The Honorary Treasurer was empowered to discharge any debt of less than £1. The previous sanction of the Committee being required in all other cases.

The Officers of the Association would be elected at the Annual General Meeting and would be a President, a Chairman, not more than four Vice-Presidents and/or Vice Chairmen, an Honorary Treasurer, and Honorary Secretary, an Honorary Editorial Secretary, at least two Honorary Auditors and two Honorary representatives to the English Table Tennis Association.

The Executive Committee of the Association was to consist of the Officers of the Association together with the duly authorised representatives of each club and would meet in September and subsequently on the request of the Chairman and Honorary Secretary. This committee would have the power to elect such sub-committees as may from time to time be deemed necessary.

The committee also had the power to recommend the expulsion or suspension of any member of the Association on account of such member's continued neglect or breach of any rule.

The Association was also entitled to admit to membership a limited number of clubs playing in the Gateshead district until such time as the said clubs were in a position to form their own district league. Affiliation to the Durham County Table Tennis Association was to be a condition precedent to the right of membership of this Association of clubs playing in the Gateshead district.

Playing regulations were listed separately but with a note that they were to be deemed to be part of the Rules of the Association.

They stated that the official rules of the English Table Tennis Association would be observed in all games, teams in each division or district league would play at home and away to every other team unless otherwise sanctioned by the Committee, the make of ball approved from time to time by the Association to be used in all matches, and the result of each match to be sent to the Honorary Secretary on the day after the match, with the card typewritten when possible.

They also stated that clubs were expected to provide adequate lighting and playing room although there was no indication as to what was deemed adequate. Combined with this was a request that players did not to wear any article likely to un-sight an opponent.

The home club was to communicate with the visiting club to make final arrangements for each match and non-fulfilment of any fixture would involve the loss of points at the discretion of the Committee. Players not present when required were liable to a penalty of two points.

No player was to play for more than one club in one season, clubs or individuals holding trophies of the Association were to be responsible for their safe keeping and return when requested, and the first and second team in each division to be promoted to the next higher and the last and second last to be relegated to the next lower division.

The regulation relating to teams and match play stated that five players were to constitute a team and two reserves to travel when possible. Each player of the one team to play each player of the other team two games of 21 points up, in the event of the score 20 all being reached, the winner to be the player who thereafter obtained a lead of two clear points. Matches to be decided on aggregate points, two points being awarded for a win and one for a draw.

No player was to play twice in a match and no lady was allowed to play for a gentlemen's team or vice-versa.

Several of the draft rules and regulations drawn up by Ken Nicholson were rejected such as the refund of subscription to any withdrawal by a club if notice had been given by 31st August, that one representative from each team be entitled to attend a General Meeting, and that Committee meetings be held in specified months of the year.

He had also suggested that all matches should be played on a Tuesday as far as possible and should start as early as possible. His other ideas which were not taken up included the appointment of two umpires and two line judges to officiate where possible and team players not to umpire until they had played and also regulations that catered for the playing of individual and team tournaments.

There is no doubt, however, that the tremendous amount of work that he had done in drawing up these regulations was a major factor in the early development of the Association.