

A History of Northumberland Table Tennis Association
By Aubrey Drapkin

CHAPTER THREE

Almost like starting afresh

On 18th December 1945 a meeting was arranged and attended by Bart Kinnair, T.Wight, T.B.A.Hutchinson, Ken Nicholson, Bill Archbold, Miss J.Young and Messrs Gibson and Chipchase who all agreed that the Association should recommence activities and they agreed to have a circular sent to all clubs and to ask the local press to advertise the fact that they wished to resume activities.

1946-1947

An Extraordinary General Meeting was called for 14th March 1946 which was attended by sixty representatives and it was agreed that a start would be made for season 1946/47. It was also agreed to ask the Duke of Northumberland to be the Patron of the Association which he agreed to be.

As Mr. Bill Archbold had retired, Chris L. Clark was appointed to act as secretary.

The Annual General Meeting was duly held on 14th May 1946 when it was agreed to go ahead.

The former President, Henry Laird, had died and Mr. M.C.Robson was elected as President, a position he was to hold for the next nine years. Messrs Stan Seymour Senior and W.S.Bell were re-elected as Vice Presidents with A.Read and Bill Archbold also appointed.

Bart Kinnair (Chairman), T.Wight and T.B.A. Hutchinson (Vice Chairmen), Ken Nicholson (Treasurer and E.T.T.A. Representative) and R.Thompson (Records Secretary) were all willing to continue in their previous roles and were all re-elected.

Chris Clark was confirmed as the new Secretary with Johnny Waugh, who was to be highly involved with the running of the Association until season 1957/58, appointed as Match and Tournament Secretary and R.Chipchase appointed Publicity Secretary.

It was agreed to put on record the thanks of the Association to the Officials who had carried on under difficult conditions with the names of Mr. Chipchase and Mr. Quick being especially emphasised.

The season eventually got under way with fifty-one teams from thirty-six clubs taking part in five divisions. Unfortunately, there were no Ladies' divisions. Numbers were down compared the last season before the war broke out but it was very gratifying when it was considered how many former clubs were just beginning to get going again after losing premises and equipment to service and Civil Defence requirements. Because of the lack of divisions for Ladies it was decided that ladies could play on men's teams, something which was to be the norm in future.

As the Secretary was to say in his first report to the membership it was almost like starting afresh.

Lack of equipment was a nightmare during the early part of the season and it was only towards the end of the season that bats and balls were becoming plentiful and tables were beginning to be manufactured again.

Apart from the League programme, the annual tournament was played with the introduction of Veterans Singles, Men's Doubles, Mixed Doubles and Youth's Singles events as well as the Men's and Ladies Singles and the Men's and Ladies Handicap Singles.

As part of the Anglo-Netherlands Sports Scheme it was agreed that four players who had agreed to pay £10 each would represent table tennis and take part in a visit to Groningen. They were very successful, and all received medals for winning the match. Mr. Batley also received an extra medal for the best individual performance.

A return match was played at Rutherford Grammar School later in the season when A.Punshon (South Shields YMCA), A.Bulmer (L.N.E.R.Accountants), Johnny Hewitt (North Durham), and Leon Kertzman (Maccabi) proved to be too strong for the Dutchmen.

Durham were beaten in a friendly match that was played at Stanley.

Teams were also entered in the National K.O. Competitions for Leagues, i.e. the Wilmott Cup for men and the Rose Bowl for women.

A.Bulmer (L.&N.E.R), J.Hewitt (N.Durham), H.Ions (Maccabi),L.Kertzman(Maccabi), J.Middlemiss(PostalClerks),R.Punshon(S.Shields Y.M.C.A.), and D.Wright(Swan Hunters) all represented the men for the County during the season.

Miss J.Purves, Miss D.Smith, and Mrs. J.R.Waugh (all L & N E R) also represented the County and were narrowly defeated in the semi final of the Rose Bowl.

As in the years before the war, an Exhibition took place when over 1000 spectators saw top players Victor Barna, Johnny Leach, Jack Carrington, England Lady International, Peggy Franks, and Scottish Lady International Helen Elliott at the City Baths Hall.

Following the success of that exhibition it was agreed to stage the first International Match to be held in Newcastle with England Women playing Scotland Women in the Western Zone Final of the European Ladies Cup. The English Ladies team of Vera Duce, Betty Blackbourne and Peggy Franks were successful. Unfortunately, the weather was atrocious, the day of the match being one of the worst winter days for years when Newcastle was almost cut off from civilisation. Even so many were waiting in the snow before the doors opened and the number of almost six hundred spectators amazed both teams.

Two of the Association's players, Hewitt and Kertzman, were invited to take part in International Trials in Liverpool and it was agreed to send them and to pay them £2.10.00 (£2.50) each towards the travel costs.

It transpired that two women had also been invited to the Trials and it was agreed that they should also go but would have to pay their own expenses!

The two men were later invited to the Final Trials in London and it was agreed that they should go and that the Association would pay half of their rail fare and half of their hotel costs. One of the women was also invited but this was not followed up.

As before the war there were clubs in membership that were based South of the River Tyne and the Durham Association were objecting to them playing in the Northumberland League. A meeting was held with representatives of the Durham Association with Northumberland proposing that any such clubs should affiliate to Durham but be allowed to play in the Northumberland League. Talks were ongoing.

Although not part of the Association's activities, top players Victor Barna and Alec Brook appeared at the Empire Theatre in Newcastle to give an exhibition when the well known comedian Arthur Askey was top of the bill.

Some of the teams in the league were there to stay for a long time, Blyth Y.M.C.A. who had been in the league from the start going on to complete forty years, L.N.E.R. Accountants (later to be called Revac) who joined in 1931 were to complete fifty four years, Postal Clerks fifty one years (joined in 1936/37), Newcastle Y.M.C.A. thirty-eight years (joined in 1936/37). Newcomers South Shields Y.M.C.A. were to stay for forty- two years whilst another new club, Maccabi were to be in the League until 2013/14, a total of sixty-eight years.

Before the war the First Division of the League had been dominated by Blyth Y.M.C.A. who had won it in each of the eight years up to 1938/39. After the fresh start the first winners were newcomers South Shields Y.M.C.A. with Blyth Y.M.C.A. 'B' team being successful in the second division and Maccabi 'B' Team finishing top of division three.

The winners of the two fourth divisions were both in the League for the first time, Thermal Syndicate taking the North Division and Murray House the South.

The Knock Out Cup was won by North Durham and the experimental three a side knock out competition by South Shields Y.M.C.A.

The Official List of Umpires totalled seven, being T.A.B.Hutchinson, Johnny Waugh, S.Scatchard, F.Ashforth, D.W.Scarth, Johnny Hewitt and Sam Boyd.

There were new winners in all of the tournament events with A.Punshon (S.Shields YMCA) taking the Men's Singles title and Doreen Smith (L.N.E.R.) the Women's Singles title. Johnny Hewitt (North Durham) and Doreen Smith were both successful in the respective Men's and Women's Handicap Singles. The new Veterans Singles was won by J.Smalley (L.N.E.R. and N.F.S) with T.Armstrong (Blyth YMCA) successful in the new Youth Singles. Johnny Hewitt completed a hat trick of victories, winning the Men's Doubles with A.Percy (North Durham), and the Mixed Doubles with Joyce Purves (L.N.E.R.)

1947/48

A few changes to the officers and officials were made for **1947/48** with three new Vice Presidents in Stan Seymour, Junior joining his father along with T.Wooding and T.Wight whilst W.S.Bell and A.Read retired. D.W.Scarth, who was to hold the position until 1955/56 when he became Chairman for one season, took over from T.Wight as a Vice Chairman. B.P. Bell replaced R.Chipchase as Publicity Secretary.

C.L. Clark moved out of the district during the course of the season and J.R. Waugh replaced him with A. Wilson taking over from the latter as Match and Tournament Secretary. A. Wilson was to hold this position until the end of the 1953/54 season and then be still involved on the Committee until the end of season 1959/60.

It was also agreed that the Executive Committee should have one representative from each division

An honorarium of thirteen guineas (thirteen pounds 65 pence) was given to the secretary at the A.G.M. in May 1947 of which three guineas (three pounds 15 pence) was to be given to the typists, Miss Smith and Miss Wright, who had typed hundreds of letters.

The method of play was agreed at four players per team who had to be numbered in order of ability, such order having to be strictly adhered to.

Each player was to play three best of three games of 21 points as follows: A v 1,2,3;
B v 2,1,4; C v 3,4,1 and D v 4,3,2.

Matches to be played strictly in accordance with the Official fixture list, i.e. commencing at 7.00p.m. prompt on the date shown in the handbook. Postponements would only be allowed in exceptional cases and notice of such postponement had to be in the hands of their opponents four days preceding the match.

The long-standing disagreement with Durham regarding clubs situated in Co Durham being able to play in the league continued with Durham stating that they should form a League in Durham and not play in the Northumberland League.

It was decided to ask the E.T.T.A. to amend their rules to provide for affiliation through County Association as a unit instead of through League as a unit, but that clubs should play in Leagues on the most convenient basis. For the current season entries from any clubs affected were still accepted.

With Table Tennis once again becoming popular the season started with an increase to ninety-two teams from fifty-six clubs divided into seven divisions as follows: 1, 2, 3, 4A, 4B, 4C and North Eastern Division.

The experimental Teams of Three K.O. Competition was not continued with.

The County Tournament was held at North Shields Y.M.C.A. and the Ladies' Doubles event was introduced.

Of the new clubs in the league, Ashington Y.M.C.A. who had previously been in for one season in 1938/39 were to stay until 1994/95 season and North Shields Y.M.C.A. for sixty-eight years until they were no longer able to use the premises in 2016.

One club is still there in 2018 although it has had many name changes. Starting out as Ministry of National Insurance, Longbenton it then became M.P.N.I., M.O.S.S., D.H.S.S., D.W.P., and then Newcastle Estates Sports and Leisure Club.

A very comprehensive fifty-six page handbook was printed, of which clubs had to buy four copies at one shilling (five pence) per copy, and contained List of Officers, Honours List, Previous Season final Tables. N.T.T.A. Rules, The Laws of the Game, Club Information, the Fixtures for the Season, Dates of Special Events and Tournaments, Notelets, County Championships Fixtures and Extracts from Rules and other County Championship information and included a comment as follows:

' TABLE TENNIS is no longer a pastime but a game, an athletic game, and it can be a very spectacular game. Do all you can to foster this view by encouraging your friends to attend the events organised by the Association.'

It also included nine full page adverts despite supplies of equipment still not being freely available. Indeed, the advert for John Jaques and Sons referred to limited supplies of equipment being available against Board of Trade buying permits. It also stated that Tables as used in the World Championships were still not available owing to the lack of suitable timber.

The first record of transfer of players between clubs was recorded with Harry Dignan going from North Shields Y.M.C.A. to North Durham and J.Everson from Newcastle Transport to West End Congers.

Two exhibitions to promote the sport were held during the season, one in Gateshead and one in Hexham which was attended by approximately two hundred people.

A team was entered in the new County Championships Competition and played in the Northern Division and were represented by Miss D.Smith, Miss Joyce Purves, Mrs J.R.Waugh (all L.& N.E.R.) Johnny Hewitt (N. Durham) Leon Kertzman (Maccabi) J.W.Middlemiss (Postal Clerks) and A.Punshon (South Shields Y.M.C.A.). Victories were achieved away from home over Cheshire 6 - 3, Yorkshire seconds 5 - 4 and Cumberland 9 - 0 with success at home against Lincolnshire 6 - 3. Unfortunately, 4 - 5 defeats came in home matches against Durham and Lancashire Seconds and the team finished third in the division.

Highlight of the season came in the National Competitions for leagues when the Men's team of Johnny Hewitt, Kertzman and Punshon beat West Cumberland 9 - 0 in Newcastle, then won away 5 - 4 against the Sunderland League and by the same score against the Grimsby League to reach the semi finals of the Wilmott Cup.

Doreen Smith, Joyce Purves and Madge Waugh progressed in the Rose Bowl with a 5 - 0 win away to the Grimsby League, a walk over against the Sunderland league and success in Newcastle 4 - 1 over the Blackpool League to get to the semis.

The Semi Finals and Finals of both the Wilmott Cup and the Rose Bowl were staged at the same time in Willesden in London when all eight of the competing teams were accompanied by coach loads of supporters. Unfortunately, the men, despite giving a good account of themselves, failed to reach the final, going down 5 - 0 to the Manchester league who went on to beat North Middlesex and win the cup. The women were up against the South Devon League in the semis and triumphed 3 - 0 to go into the final against a very strong Birmingham League side who had accounted for North Middlesex in the other semi.

A tremendous performance from the Northumberland Ladies saw them triumph 3 - 2 against all the odds to win the County's first ever trophy. A report in the English Table Tennis

Magazine carried the line that players from the 'Far North' can produce players to rank with the best!

The tournament (known in those days as the Individual Championship) saw J.W.Middlemiss of Postal Clerks triumph in the Men's Singles and Miss Doreen Smith (L.N.E.R.) retain the Women's Singles title. The Handicap singles were won by A. Percy (North Durham) in the men's and Miss S.Kertzman of Maccabi in the women's event.

The South Shields Y.M.C.A. pairing of A.Punshon and S.Myers were successful in the Men's Doubles with Johnny Hewitt (N.Durham) and Miss Joyce Purves (L.N.E. R.) retaining the Mixed Doubles title. Joyce Purves was also successful partnered by Madge Waugh (also L.N.E.R..) in the new Ladies' Doubles. M. Wood of Blyth Y.M.C.A. won the Youth's Singles with J.Smalley of N.F.S. retaining the Veteran's Singles title.

In the League L.N.E.R. Accountants became the new First Division Champions and newcomers Ministry of National Insurance 'A' won the Second Division. South Shields Y.M.C.A. 'B' team won the Third Division. The three successful sides in the Fourth Divisions were Postal Clerks 'C' team in the A division, North Durham 'C' in the B division and Ministry of National Insurance C team in the C division. Ashington Y.M.C.A. were the winners of the new North Eastern Division and South Shields Y.M.C.A. won the K.O. Competition.

1948-1949

The following season, **1948/49**, saw the same set of officials looking after things with the exception that there was no longer a Publicity Secretary.

Of the Official Umpires, T.A.B.Hutchinson and F.Ashforth were no longer on the list but H.Irons was added thereto.

The growth of the number of clubs and teams continued with ninety-eight teams from fifty eight clubs participating in the league which now had eight divisions. The set up was again changed with a First Division, a Second Division, a Third Division, a Fourth Division, three Fifth Divisions and the North Eastern Division.

The new clubs included BBC House Boy's Club of Gateshead who had previously been in membership in 1937/38 and 1938/39 seasons and were now to stay until the end of season 1977/78.

The rules had been thoroughly revised by a small committee and a complete set of rules drawn up for the knock out competition.

Regarding the question of players and clubs who were actually in the County Durham area and had to affiliate them it was decided that they could still play in the Northumberland league provided that they had the permission of the Executive Committee.

A rule was brought in that any player not present when his match was due to be played would automatically forfeit it except with the opposing captain's consent.

The rule regarding postponements stated that in the case of the Premier Division and subject to appeal to the Executive Committee either side unable to fulfil a fixture strictly in accordance with the fixture chart would forfeit the match to the opposing team. There was, however, no

reference to a Premier Division in the list of fixtures and presumably it referred to the First Division!

The old rule whereby an umpire was empowered to declare void a game on the grounds that it constituted unenterprising defensive play was done away with.

The now usual entries were made of teams in the County Championships, the Wilmott Cup and the Rose Bowl. The Annual Tournament, now referred to as the Closed Tournament was arranged at North Shields Y.M.C.A. with the finals to be held at Rutherford College Hall in Newcastle which was also the venue for all of the home County matches.

Equipment was much more readily available after the shortage created by the war and permits for the purchase of balls were no longer required.

For the very first time the County fielded a Junior side that played a friendly match against Durham in Newcastle. R.Heslop (N.Durham), B.Donkin (West End Boys Club), B.Thompson (Blyth Y.M.C.A.), N.Gibson (Gateshead Y.M.C.A.) and L.Rose (Maccabi) were the youngsters to represent the County at this level.

Following the success of the Ladies in the Rose Bowl the E.T.T.A. decided to stage a match between the South of England Ladies and the North of England Ladies as a trial for places in the National team. This was held at the City Baths Hall but turned out to be disappointing and not as popular as had been hoped for. The North of England team which lost 6 - 3 included Joyce Purves and Doreen Smith but they were below par on the night. Doreen Smith, however, had been named as a reserve for the England team to play Czechoslovakia.

The County continued to try to help the Hexham area to promote table tennis by staging another exhibition match in Hexham.

Following the success of the visits of Internationals to play exhibitions in previous years it was agreed to stage one against the touring Czechoslovakian squad that included the 1946/47 world champion Bohumil Vana and the most attractive stylist Ivan Andreas who had won the English Open Championship in the same year. The exhibition was also held at the City Baths Hall but was not the great success that previous ones had been.

A. Punshon and Joyce Purves were both successful at the Hartlepoons' Open Tournament winning the Men's and Women's Singles titles respectively and Joyce combining with Madge Waugh to also take the Women's Doubles crown.

The County Championships saw the Northumberland side once again in the Northern Section and they won three and lost three of their matches.

In the Wilmott Cup the Men beat the Carlisle League, Sunderland League, and Cambridge League but went out at the hands of the South London League.

The Rose Bowl side was the same one that won the trophy the previous year but they could not repeat the feat, losing out 7 - 2 away to the Manchester League after beating the Grimsby league at home.

On the domestic front North Durham became a force to be reckoned with and won the First Division, winning all twenty-six of their matches as well as winning the Knock Out Cup.

Postal Clerks 'B' finished top of Division Two and Gateshead Y.M.C.A. 'A' triumphed in Division Three.

Newcastle Y.M.C.A.'C' team won Division Four whilst Gateshead Y.M.C.A.'B', Cullercoats Y.M.C.A.'A', and Ministry of Works 'B' were the victors in Division Five A, B and C. Ashington Y.M.C.A. retained the North Eastern Division title.

The successful players in the Closed Tournament were led by Doreen Smith (L.N.E.R.) who won the Women's Singles for the third year in succession, the Ladies Doubles with team mate Miss M. Elliott and the Mixed Doubles with another L.N.E.R. player, B.Moore.

B.Moore was the Men's Singles Champion whilst J.Smalley (now of Newcastle Y.M.C.A) took the Veterans' Singles for the third time in a row.

The Handicap Singles were won by J.Middlemiss of Postal Clerks in the Men's event and Miss E.S.Tully of Westonians in the Women's event.

At the other end of the age scale B.Thompson of Blyth Y.M.C.A. took the Youth's Singles title.

For some reason the Men's Doubles event was unfinished and despite a suggestion that it be completed the following season this never happened.

1949-1950

The Records Secretary resigned at the end of the season and R.Farrow took over for 1949/50 season and R.Littlejohn was appointed as Assistant Treasurer later in the season. W.P. Allen was added as a Vice President.

R.Farrow held the position of Records Secretary up to and including 1957/58, thereafter serving on the Committee until 1966.

R.Littlejohn, L.Kertzman, A.Percy and N.W.Boyd were all added to the Official Umpires list but Sam Boyd had come off the list.

When the war had brought proceedings to a halt in 1939 there were sixty-seven teams from fifty-seven clubs in membership when Mr Buglass criticised the Committee for allowing things to lapse and doubted whether the lost ground would ever be made up.

Now at the start of the 1949/50 season he was shown to be completely wrong as there were now one hundred and twelve teams from sixty-four clubs and an extra Division Four was added making nine divisions in total.

A handbook was again produced which turned out to be the model for the next twenty-seven years and contained sixty-eight pages including ten full page adverts. The contents included List of Officials, Rules, Laws of the Game, previous season county match results and tables, fixture charts and club information, previous season final league tables, tournament results and records, world championship records and English championship results and records.

One change was made to the Club Match Regulations bringing in a rule that clubs operating more than one team must not under any circumstances play any of the numbers one, two or three players of a team in any lower team.

Teams were once again entered in the Northern Division of the County Championships, the Wilmott Cup and the Rose Bowl but were knocked out of both Cup Competitions at an early stage.

It was a successful season in the Northern Division, however with victories home and away against Cumberland, Yorkshire and Durham to finish top of the table with a one hundred per cent record.

On the Junior front several of the most promising Juniors were both gaining limited experience and improving generally but it was unfortunate that a proposed match against the Durham Junior team did not materialise. To offset this the Swedish Junior International team was invited to Newcastle to play against Northumberland's side of J. Hillyer (Newcastle Y.M.C.A.) L. Rose (Maccabi) and M. Armstrong (Whitley Bay Y.M.C.A.) at Rutherford College Hall in Newcastle. Though defeated the home side was certainly not disgraced.

As the Association was growing so too were the problems of running the League Competition with lack of discipline in conforming with the Rules, Club Match Regulations and Knock Out Cup Rules becoming more pronounced. In particular late starts to matches and incorrect playing order were becoming major problems together with too many postponements. From the Records Secretary's point of view late receipt of score cards made his job more difficult.

There was a record number of entries into the County Closed Championships with the preliminary rounds staged once again in the Sir James Knott Youth Centre, home of North Shields Y.M.C.A. and the finals in Newcastle at Rutherford College.

A. Punshon of South Shields Y.M.C.A. won the Men's Singles and also the Mens' Handicap Singles. Mrs J. Hewitt (North Durham) was successful in the Women's Singles and also won the Mixed Doubles with her husband Johnny who partnered A. Coffey, (also of N. Durham) to victory in the Men's Doubles.

The Revac pairing of Miss D. Smith and Miss M. Elliott retained the Ladies' Doubles title and another Revac player, N. Proud, won the Veterans' Singles.

Miss S. Rutherford of Ministry of Works won the Women's Handicap Singles and Newcastle Y.M.C.A.'s young player J. Hillier won the Youths' Singles.

There had still not been very much progress in having coaches although the St. Lawrence club had approached Newcastle Education Committee who had agreed to an appointment at their club and Mr. Ashforth had been appointed.

On the Social side of things, it was decided to hold the first ever Association dance at the Brighton Assembly Rooms in Westgate Road, Newcastle. Unfortunately lack of support was most disappointing and regrettably it was decided that further efforts to extend the social activities would have to be carefully considered in the future.

By the end of the forties the cost of tables was in the region of £30 to £40, the cost of bats ranged from five shillings and eleven pence to ten shillings (thirty to fifty pence). Nets were three shillings (fifteen pence), and the posts twelve shillings and three pence (sixty one pence) whilst a sheet of bat rubber was one shilling (five pence). Balls were still expensive at approximately one shilling (five pence) each.

The finances of the Association were by now very satisfactory with an accumulated surplus from day one of £28. The Donation scheme introduced in 1947 had been a great help, raising £143 over three years. The fees for entry into the league had been held for a few years at fifteen shillings (seventy five pence) per club plus five shillings (twenty five pence) per team and one shilling (five pence) for the K.O. Cup.

North Durham 'A' continued to be the strongest team in the league winning the First Division once again and retaining the Knock Out Cup whilst their 'C' team won Division Three. Newcastle Y.M.C.A. 'B' was successful in Division Two and their 'D' team took Division Five A.

Gateshead Y.M.C.A. also achieved two titles, their 'B' side taking Division Four B and their 'C team' winning Division Five C. Saint Anthony's House were successful in Division Four A, Whitley Bay Y.M.C.A. 'B' won Division Five B and Seaton Delaval Miners' Welfare took the North Eastern Division title.