

RON CRAYDEN
An Appreciation
by Ken Muhr

So many writers of table tennis, such as Telegraph journalist John Woodford, and fellow Table Tennis News county notes columnists Alf Peppard and Colin Deaton, have died in recent years!

Now Ron Crayden, from Sutton, Surrey, a major figure in English and international table tennis who passed away on 9th December aged around 87. Had his long and extensive commitment been in a more high profile sport, he undoubtedly would have been given large obituaries in the national British press.

I never saw Ron performing as a top England and Surrey player – and I discover that he was good at tennis as well – and only caught the tail end of his incredible record of a 225 times England captain (particularly of the women's team): a tall, elegant, blazered gentleman leading on his charges at international matches. He was a charming, wise, informed, fair-minded and diplomatic England selector, and chairman of selectors.

However, it was Ron as a write and historian of table tennis who I got to know, while I was ETTA Information Officer. Gerald Gurney may have known more of the origins of the game, and Johnny Leach more of what it was actually like playing the top players of his era, but I think that Ron was the overall historical expert on the top level competitive sport, perhaps from the founding of the ITTF under Ivor Montagu in 1926 through to the 1970s. Maybe in this area the only person who could rival Ron was the late Zdenko Uzorinac from Croatia. Drawing from his deep knowledge and experience, and his collection of TT (400) books and magazines, Ron wrote a vast number of educated articles on table tennis, culminating in his concisely written text (book), *'The Story of Table Tennis – the first 100 years'* (1995).

When, as ETTA Information Officer, I needed further information or enlightenment on an old former or deceased top player or official, Ron was my first source, and I knew that he would give immediate time and attention to supplying me with it, coming back within a few hours with what he could not give by immediate recall. He always was friendly and obliging, and although he didn't complain, he did acknowledge that he was constantly being asked to write obituaries for his peers (as well as articles and brief histories for magazines and programmes etc.)! I hope that someone will have done Ron due justice in providing a fitting tribute to him.

When in the summer of 2003 I informed Ron that I was leaving the ETTA, and thanked him for his considerable support, he said that he supposed we would never speak again. I demurred, but regrettably Ron was proved correct. Thankfully Ian Marshall, for the ITTF Magazine, belatedly did something I had intended to do: conduct a full interview on his career for publication.

If it were not for Ron, our historical knowledge and understanding of table tennis would be greatly diminished. We are most grateful for his tremendous contribution to our sport.