

OBITUARY

SIDNEY WILLIAM BATRICK (1930-2002)

Less than a month after last year's Alleyn's Fives Festival, in the course of which the refurbished small courts were named after Sid Batrick, came the sad news of Sid's death. John Pretlove spoke movingly at Sid's funeral, and the following tribute is taken from his address:

Sidney was first introduced to Fives in October 1945. He recalled his first game to me only quite recently. It was a Tuesday afternoon in the old courts, and joining Sid were Messrs Keyes and Slattery, with Bert Hird trying to teach them how to play. Sid described it thus: 'I can still recall the laughter when we missed the ball completely, the agony when we managed to hit it. Hird accused me of being a) blind and b) stupid. Keyes accused Hird of making up the rules of the game (later proved true!)'.



Sid in front of The Sidney Batrick Courts at Alleyn's.

That first game was the beginning of Sid's fives career, which lasted for almost 60 years, and which brought him such joy. On leaving school, he immediately joined the AOB Fives Club. At this time, what Sid lacked in skill was more than compensated by a terrific determination and a high level of fitness. He represented the Club in countless matches and pitted his skills against opponents from all over the country.

Sid was a stickler for the rules and would be upset when – on rare occasions – an opponent called 'up' when his shot was definitely 'down'. At that point a withering stare was directed at the culprit and not a word spoken! He always got the message across, and the offender never repeated his transgression.

I recall with great clarity Tuesday evenings in the 1970s and 80s playing with Roy Birmingham, Sid and Joe Botwright. Play was competitive, with plenty of fun and laughter. Our combined ages totalled well over 200 years, and our combined weight definitely above 50 stone...

In the 1980s and early 90s, it became obvious to us that the game was hardly being played at Alleyn's and had all but disappeared from the curriculum. Fortunately, Colin Niven's headship was in its early days and, as a former player himself, he responded positively when Sid, Roy and I went to see him and offered our help.

In short, we began a coaching programme, and slowly but surely the number of boys (and girls) playing the game increased and enabled competition against other schools and clubs to resume. Without a doubt, Sid played the major role in this revival.

It was during this period I came to realise just how much the school meant to Sid and how much he loved Fives. He became dedicated to the task and gave generously of his time, week in, week out, month after month – for him it was a labour of love. He became an understanding and good coach and taught the game thoroughly and well, generously sharing his experience, knowledge and skills with all those who were prepared to listen.

On 21st June this year, the Headmaster organised a Festival of Fives. The event was to celebrate the renovation of all the courts and the revival of the game at Alleyn's. In addition it was to honour Sid for his selfless contribution to this revival by naming the old courts 'The Sidney Batrick Courts'. The simple and short ceremony, generously applauded by everyone present, obviously touched Sid greatly and gave him tremendous pleasure. It was an honour justly deserved.

JFP

Further to John Pretlove's tribute to Sid, Bob Dolby writes:

All those AOBs who played with Sid throughout the years will have many fond memories of him and several tales to tell. Most will recall the central role played by 'Sid's ball', dried in the airing cupboard, heated on the radiator and cooked in the oven until it was so lightning fast that he was able to serve out any opponent nine times out of ten on his beloved front courts at Alleyn's.

At the most recent RFA Dinner at Roehampton, just a few months before his death, I sat with Sid and we talked of the modern ball and just how hard players like Robin Perry and Hamish Buchanan hit it. 'I tell you what, Bob', said Sid, with intimations of his own mortality, 'I don't know if I believe in reincarnation, but I wouldn't want to come back as a G6!'

I've never been able to look at a fives ball in quite the same light since.

RLD