

It came as rather a rude shock in March 1992 to be told, quite out of the blue, that after 29 years on the staff at Sutton Valence School, I would be surplus to requirements at the end of the academic year, but it meant that later that year, when Jane Fuller wanted to give up as General Secretary, I was free to apply for the job – and I was delighted to get it.

At that stage I was rather on the fringes of the fives-playing world and, to start with, there was a steep learning curve to be tackled; but it was a challenge I eagerly accepted because the rewards (and I'm not talking about money here) were so great: doing something that I knew was worthwhile was in itself very satisfying, and getting to meet and make friends with many who, until then, had been no more than names on the membership list, was a real bonus. It also meant that I would forcibly have to drag myself into the world of modern technology, by which I mean having to learn to use a computer. Ten years on and I can word-process and send emails, but I'm afraid I can't get very enthusiastic about it all and, apart from occasional visits to the RFA and EFA websites, I shy away from the internet.

When I collected the Association's original Amstrad computer, the numerous files and the boxes of gloves, sweatshirts and polo shirts from Jane early in 1993, she was delighted once again to have a spare bedroom. In the course of ten years, I managed to spread myself well beyond the room I call my study; more often than not the dining-room table was taken over as an extension of my desk, and latterly I moved my computer upstairs into what was once my son's bedroom.

In my first few years as General Secretary, the bulk of the work related to preparing for and writing the minutes of meetings of the General Committee and Executive Sub-Committee, and to producing three newsletters a year. It was nearly all related to business generated by the RFA but, as the years have gone by, so the amount of externally generated business has increased – some of it, such as that relating to the development of the Fives Forum, very welcome; some of it rather less so but nonetheless necessary.

When I took over from Jane, the National Lottery was in its infancy. I went to one of the roadshow presentations to learn how to apply for grants for sports-related projects, but at that stage it didn't seem particularly relevant. It was only some years later when the Derby Mercia Club, having discovered the semi-derelict courts at Derby Moor Community School, wanted to restore and upgrade them so that they could be used not just by them but, more importantly, by pupils at the school and by the local community, that an application for lottery money became a real possibility. Sadly, the application was rejected.

Lottery money was certainly not a possibility for the coaching/promotional video we commissioned in the mid-nineties, but the Foundation for Sport and the Arts came to our help and we were most grateful for the financial support we received. The successful accomplishment of such a project was a tremendous morale-booster for those involved in the administration of the game, and the video itself has great potential as a promotional tool – if only one could find ways of ensuring that it was watched by those in authority at schools where the game is, for whatever reason, languishing.

During my latter years in office, ever more work seemed to be generated by the demands of the modern politically correct society in which we now live. Equality of opportunity is a big thing and whether or not (or to what extent) it applies to a game such as ours is irrelevant: we must have policy statements and development programmes to ensure that there is no

discrimination on grounds of race, sex, age or disability. (I believe that the plans for the refurbished Derby Moor courts allowed for wheelchair access not just to the spectating area but also to the courts themselves. The mind boggles!)

And then there is the minefield of child protection: the RFA currently has no coaches, but the day may soon come when we do become more directly involved in the coaching of the game. If/when that happens, we shall have to have in place a code of practice not just to safeguard children from paedophile coaches but also to safeguard coaches from unscrupulous children. The breakdown of trust and the increasingly litigious nature of modern society make it almost impossible to produce a satisfactory code of practice.



Picture: David Barnes

Michael Beaman (left) hands over to Ian Fuller.

A few paragraphs back I referred to the Fives Forum. When I took office it concerned me that there appeared to be such a lot of mutual suspicion between those who played Rugby fives and those who played Eton fives. I take no credit whatsoever for the breakdown of that suspicion that led, two years ago, to the founding of the Fives Forum, but it is a source of great pleasure to me that the two governing bodies are now working together on matters of mutual concern, and that more and more fives players are playing both Rugby and Eton fives.

One lasting memory of my ten years as GS will be the devotion to duty shown by the Presidents and Committee members whom I have served. Fives is not exactly a household word but, without the sort of dedication that they have shown, the future of the game would be far more precarious than it is at present. I believe that the sad decline of fives that was a feature of the latter half of the 20th century has been halted and that the future is brighter now than it has been for many years. Please do whatever you can to prove me right!

Michael Beaman

Paddy d'Ancona, a faithful reader of 'Esquire Magazine' as well as a top fives player, tells us that the June edition of the mag featured 'The 100 Most Overrated & Underrated Things on the Planet'. In the 'World of Sport' section, top of the 'Most Overrated' column was Squash, while at the head of the 'Most Underrated' list was Fives!
