

Jerry Cooper 1935-2015

Jerry Cooper died in December 2015, aged 80. Jerry was President of the RFA from 1997 to 1999, having been in charge of Fives at Bedford School from 1963 to 1993, during which time Bedford School won the Schools' Singles title seven times* and the Doubles twice.**

A staunch supporter of Fives at all levels and throughout the land, Jerry's name will live on in the trophy he presented in 2013 for the Midlands Schools Regional Open Singles: The Cooper Cup.

There were warm tributes to him at his funeral. The following were sent to the RFA:

David Dance: I was really sad to hear this sad news, but it took me back to Easter terms at Bedford School and very happy memories of Jerry, usually with a fag in his mouth and a wry grin on his face, offering us some piece of sage advice. As a fives coach he achieved the most extraordinary run of success, with Bedford boys winning the 'Public Schools' Championships' year after year during his tenure, which surely speaks for itself, and yet he did it all with a minimum of fuss and certainly none of the 'protein shakes' and 365 day training that seems to characterise schools sports nowadays! He also managed to swallow his Old Modernian pride – most of the time! When he did offer suggestions about how to improve one's game, it was always spot on, and when he felt that it would be useful to seek greater challenges, he would lay them on – in particular I remember him arranging for David Hebblethwaite to come and play against Charlie Pattison and me when he felt we needed stretching further (not something that I remember David needing to do much when we played!). We also relished occasional epic battles against Cooper and Prigmore!

But the thing I remember Jerry for best was the way he trusted us and treated like adults in a way that no other master did at that time. He was quite happy to send us off on our own for a while in full knowledge that we might well pop into a pub for a post-match pint but knowing that we would not let him down. He was also the only member of staff I can remember who was willing to let us know that he did not accept every aspect of the school orthodoxy as gospel. As a result we developed the sort of relationship that explained why he was the only one of my former teachers that I felt moved to contact when he eventually retired. I saw him from time to time after this during infrequent visits to Bedford, and it was clear that his understated enthusiasm for fives hadn't dimmed. He was a great servant to the school and the game, and a great friend to generations of Bedfordian fives players, who will miss his mischievous grin and his avuncular presence.

Richard Kemp: I am also very sorry to hear this news and would endorse all of David's very well-chosen words on the skill, enthusiasm, encouragement and kindness that Jerry brought to those of us fortunate enough to have been pupils of his. My recollection from my own short time at the school is that three of the four members of the 1974 Bedford School IV won the National Schools' singles (Charles Pattison in 1974, Mark Lloyd-Williams in 1975 and Ian Peck in 1976), and if David, who played in the immediately preceding years' IVs, did not then he would join Stuart Endersby in being one of the best players not to do so. Jerry's record as a coach must therefore be at the upper end of any ranking but, as David has eloquently described, the way he treated us as young adults rather than miscreant pupils is at the forefront of my memory of him.

Gareth Quarry: Sad news indeed. Jerry ('JIC', rather unoriginally, to us boys) was an inspirational teacher of Fives and without doubt the predominant driving force behind Bedford's significant achievement on court over his three decades in charge. Our connections were many – he got me hooked on the great game; his father, also a teacher, had taught my father at 'The Other Place', BMS; and he lived next-door-but-one to me for my 10 years at Bedford but always turned a blind eye to my going out in the evening without the required exeat! A true gentleman and old fashioned (in the positive sense) school master. One of the best who will be sadly missed. RIP JIC.

Julian Dalzell: Jerry ... had the misfortune to teach me Geography but also encouraged me in the game of Fives. He regularly invited me to play and practise with the OBMs along with David, Bob Smith and Geoff Prigmore. Those were hugely happy memories. He laughed a lot, he played with spirit and he never failed to provide support, encouragement and wisdom to his players. I lived around the corner from him as I grew up and would often see him in the neighbourhood - and since my father was also on staff at Bedford School, I got to see him in that community. Much respected by his peers, he leaves an enviable legacy of professionalism, contribution and influence on many generations. He will be sadly missed.

* National Schools Open Singles winners: Malcolm Chesworth (1963), Julian Dalzell (1967), Jerry Mytton (1968), MI McLaren (1971), Charles Pattison (1974), Ian Peck (1975) and Mark Lloyd-Williams (1976).

** National Schools Open Doubles winners: Pattison & Peck (1974), Hurt & Kirkby (1978).