

Geoffrey Philip Sherratt 1941-2022

The Rugby Fives Association, March 2022

The RFA is sad to report the death, at the age of 80, of ex-President Geoff Sherratt after a long illness. Life-long friend Dave Hebden has compiled the following tribute to Geoff with help from Peter Woods and David Barnes.

Geoff's great friend and Manchester YM Fives buddy Peter Woods (Woody) writes ...

Geoff reminded me how we started playing fives around the early 1970's. We were sat resting having finished the keep Fit Class in the YM Gym, when out from the double doors came two guys, wet through, dripping in sweat – it was Fred Pendlebury and Alec Murray.

Geoff said what have they been doing? I said “Fives”, he asked what that was, and I had two pairs of gloves and a ball, so that evening we had a knock and the rest is history.

Eventually Fred Beswick saw a little potential and took us under his wing ... Fred organised us into some sort of a team and we travelled the country playing matches and tournaments. We got some really good hidings in those early matches but somehow Fred persevered. We soon became great pals with all the players from around the country. We played Club matches at Sheffield Uni, Leeds Uni, Manchester Uni, Durham Uni, and schools like Sedbergh and Rossall where we would play the Staff and Senior boys.

We would also put people up for matches -- our wives were an important part of the Manchester fives scene, helping out at tournaments, and the Southern contingent would reciprocate. We had some great trips and we would even take our children when they came along.

Dave Hebden writes ...

I first met Geoff a little over 50 years ago. 50 years of valued friendship which I feel lucky to have enjoyed. I have many fond memories, a few of which, the more respectable ones, I will share with you below.,,

We met through the game of fives which remained an important bond between us right until the end. In recent months when I spoke to Geoff, fives was a topic that he would often bring up. We had some great shared memories. It was important to him.

Woody has explained how Geoff and he started playing fives at the Manchester YM.

I would like to add something about the YM here. I first went there in 1970 and found many great characters, Fred Beswick, Ernie Livesey, too many to name them all, everyone was very welcoming with fantastic hospitality, and the partners and wives were very much included in that. There was a lot of humour, and guaranteed good exercise, often climbing up the stairs to play fives at the top of the building, only to lose in quick time to Wayne!

My friend and fives partner Ian Fuller and I share a great affection for the YM and all the people associated with it. It's been an important factor in our lives. Geoff Sherratt was a huge part of that.

Geoff became Club Captain and led the YM Fives Club into what we should call their glory years. 16 National Club wins, twice as many as any other club in the country. Geoff was always there, playing an important role in the matches, and if he wasn't playing, he would be supporting. Geoff appeared in the 1979 triumphant team comprising Wayne Enstone, Tony Wynn, Geoff Sherratt and Alec Murray. In 1987 Geoff was back in the YM final winning team alongside Wane Enstone, Steve Ashton and Dave Curry.

Geoff was a very good player. Whenever I said that to him, he would say, modestly, that he didn't have any skill, but he did. Two good hands and a determination which will surprise no-one, this being very evident in his battles with illness. I'm proud to say Geoff & I won an Open Doubles title together in the South West -- there's a photo of Geoff celebrating this included below, a big smile on his face holding the trophy up above him like the FA Cup.

But his best days as a player were later in the Veterans Championships. Geoff first qualified to enter the Veterans Championships in April 1987. He reached the final by beating Roger Freebairn in the semis, but lost in the final to Tony Hughes, his doubles partner. The following year Geoff was back and this time he won the Doubles, partnering the great John Howe. John and Geoff retained their title over the next two years in 1989 and 1990, a superb achievement.

Geoff also showed great skills in administrative roles. He ran the North West Fives Championships for 14 years before handing over to John Beswick. He was a strict but fair organiser, woe betide any player who turned up late for their match!

Geoff was very proud to be elected President of the RFA in 2003. As anyone who knew Geoff would expect, he fulfilled his duties with great energy and commitment, travelling all over the country to attend tournaments, encouraging young players, and travelling down to London for meetings. He played an important part in the administration and development of the RFA during the period 2001-2003 (as Deputy President) and 2003-05 (as President). The Association is hugely grateful to him for this effort.

Tributes from fellow players ...

- A lovely chap who could always be relied upon for good fun on court and socially
- I never knew Geoff in his playing days, but I did know what a great character he was -- and I know what a great friend and supporter of our great game we have lost
- Geoff was a serious and dedicated servant of the game, and was also great company
- Lovely chap, kind hearted, funny; very competitive player too
- Geoff was a great of the Fives world and a lovely, lovely man
- Geoff was such a great contributor to the game of Fives in the golden era of the game at the YM - I am sure Fred Beswick has a couple of pints lined up to welcome him!

Some photos through the years ...



1974 YM: Micky Ayres, Geoff Sherratt, Fred Beswick, Danny McGregor, Wayne Enstone. Pete Woods



1986 SW Open: Geoff Sherratt & Dave Hebden with Wayne Enstone



1990 Veterans Doubles: Geoff Sherratt & John Howe



2003 RFA AGM: President Geoff Sherratt in the chair



2003 on the circuit: Geoff with David Barnes



2004 at Derby Moor: Geoff with Denise Hall-Wilton and Bob Dolby

Some additional information from David Barnes:

‘Manchester Championships’ (3 different names)

1977 Geoff organised the Lancashire Open Championships, taking over from Fred Beswick.

1978-79-80-81-82-83-84-85-86 Geoff organised the (renamed) Greater Manchester County Open Championships.

Then he organised the (again renamed) North West Open Championships 1987-88-89-90.

So Geoff organised the same regional event, with three different names, for 14 years. John Beswick took over as organiser of the North West Open in 1991.

Wood Cup (National Club Championship)

The YMCA have the proudest record in the Wood Cup competition: 16 wins out of 26 appearances in the final. We don't know exactly how often Geoff played for the Club squad in the Wood Cup, but it must have been a large number of times. The following skimpy details are from the RFA Handbook, which was not always good at recording names of players.

In 1978 Geoff played a key role supporting the YMCA squad which succeeded in winning their first Wood Cup Trophy, with Enstone, Wynn, Murray and Woods playing in the final.

The following year Geoff was in the YMCA side to win the Wood Cup final (Enstone, Wynn, Sherratt and Murray). The semi-finals and final were played on the Merchant Taylors' School courts, and the other finalists were the Old Merchant Taylors'.

The YMCA went on to win the Wood Cup in 1983, 1984, 1985, and 1986. In each of these years the winning final side was Enstone, Ashton, Davies and Hyde, but Geoff contributed in each of these campaigns in the earlier rounds.

In 1987 Geoff was back in the YMCA final winning team alongside Enstone, Ashton and Curry.

Open Championships

Although a late starter in the game of Fives, Geoff became a very good player. In addition to his contribution to YM Fives, Geoff was often to be seen on the open tournament circuit. He was always competitive and had some notable successes, including winning the South West Doubles with Dave Hebden in 1986 and having a good run in the National Doubles with Wayne Enstone in the late 1980s.

Veterans Championships

Geoff first qualified by age to enter the Veterans Championships in April 1987. He reached the final by beating Roger Freebairn in the semis, but lost in the final to Tony Hughes, his doubles partner.

Geoff's glory years in the Veterans event were 1988, 1989 and 1990 when he won the Doubles with John Howe. He and John were also runners-up in 1991.
