



TABLE TENNIS A FEW MEMORIES OF THE PAST 20 YEARS

by Helen Berry

I began playing Table Tennis in 1985 during the Summer Season when it was played at St. Vincent's Recreation Centre at Noarlunga. One of the members (John Hack) worked with my husband at Chrysler, and as there were people needed for reserves I put up my hand, not knowing the game but prepared to have a try. (I had always played tennis, and thought it would be fun to run around a table to hit the ball instead of a big tennis court). The coming winter season I joined the Reynella Table Tennis Club, it's home base being the Christies Beach East Primary School on Elizabeth Road.

My husband Kim and two of our children Carol and Wayne also joined. The Club in those days was very competently run by two real enthusiasts Helen and Alan Raftery.

Due to injury, I only made it through the first season, but there was talk going around that it would be great if the Association had it's own facilities, and so a fundraising programme was established by some very willing members i.e. Ian Morris, Geoff Goss, Helen and Alan Raftery, Jo Storcken and Bev and Brian James.

The year of 1986 I was unable to play for the first half of the season so I was approached to see if I would go around to the different clubs which were based around the local area and cajole people into selling Chocolates as a fundraiser. I was amazed how many were willing to participate, and this became our major fundraiser.

Week after week I would drive around to the clubs to collect the money and give out boxes of chocolates (I remember thinking what a lot of sweet tooths there were) It was great getting to know people and how much they enjoyed our sport.

I remember another of our fundraisers was organised by Ian Morris - that being a grape picking session at the Reynella Winery, and I must say those who participated had a great time.

When it came to enthusiasm for the building of the stadium, Ian Morris, our council rep. was one of the best. He could talk anyone into helping.

Finally the day came when Council had approved the efforts of those very willing people, and the Stadium now became a reality. Now it was up to as many as we could get interested, once the "tin shed" was erected, to finish the inside.

After work (thank goodness for daylight saving) and weekends we would toil away, rain or shine we would be there digging drains, painting the millions of meters of wood panelling etc, our reward was the friendships formed by this small army of volunteers when we would sit down and enjoy our sausage sizzle meal at the end of each day.

I remember how proud we all felt the first night of play, the members were enthralled with their new home, even though we still had to utilise a couple of other venues to fit all the matches in as our numbers were far greater than today. We played on bare cement floors, with only a few barriers between the tables, but what laughter we had. I think it was raining that night, and the car park was pretty muddy, so the day after matches a few

willing people turned up at the stadium to wash the floors. What a job that was – a bucket of water and a mop on concrete, but lots of camaraderie as we emptied each bucket of mud outside and refilled our bucket for the next patch we were to tackle. This became a regular daily outing the morning after matches for Bev James, Judy Morris and I until the new wooden floor was laid at the end of that season – again by some very willing volunteers who were rewarded once again for their efforts with a “sausage sizzle”.

The day came when we had to put the varnish on it and that was really funny. None of us realised that the varnish had fumes that would eventually affect us because of the lack of ventilation in the stadium, in fact it made us all quite light headed and almost drunk, so much so that it was giggle time for all, with someone even trying to skate - slip across the floor as we closed the doors.

What a shame today people aren't able to participate in building those same foundations for their sport. They are missing out on all the wonderful bonding that comes with this type of participation.

Since that fantastic time I have been involved with the running of the stadium as a volunteer in the canteen, and also on the Executive Committee. I have opened the stadium doors for the children to come and play table tennis for school sports, been there when the State competitions were held and marvelled at the accomplishments of some of our children as they have come through the ranks to compete in and win State competition only to be saddened when they move on through work and change of life style. Our own Tournaments held during the July school holidays are a great source of entertainment with players from all grades participating, culminating in a “bbq” on the Sunday for all those who played.

I was lucky enough to open up for a group of visually impaired people to come and play table tennis, and was amazed to find they use a ball much larger than ours with a rattle inside and a wooden net they have to hit the ball under. How serious they were with their sport, but what great fun they had.

I have been there when it was time to change all the lights, and laughed at the number of balls retrieved from up in the rafters. I wonder how they got there!

I've seen the change from 38mm to 40mm balls and been fascinated by the reaction to the players to something new for our sport. I remember when we had to change our bat rubbers from any colour to the compulsory red and black and the reactions of some. New rules have come and gone, from playing 3 sets first to 21 it's now 5 sets first to 11, white balls to orange.

I am so proud to walk down the corridor, look up at the walls and see the work Bev and Brian James have put into recording our history, to walk into the canteen and see the work Geoff Goss and Jo Storcken put into building it, to look out over the stadium and see that it was volunteers who built most of it and reflect on my memories of participation as a player and worker.

20 years down the track it saddens me to see that same enthusiasm not there. Where once we would talk our families, neighbours, workmates or just someone we would meet on the street to come and join I am seeing our numbers gradually shrinking - a sign of the times as life outside the home and work is gradually changing, and I wonder why as it seems to be affecting not only our own sport but so many others as well and ask myself “How do we enthuse people again?”