

From Zero To Hero



Brian Adams
Northampton U3A

It's taken only about 130 years since table tennis was 'invented' and for it to become one of the Northampton U3A groups... but it's here now and here to stay!

Like many other sports, table tennis began as a mild social diversion during the last quarter of the 19th century when, after dinner, some upper-middle class Victorians decided to turn their dining room tables into miniature versions of the traditional lawn tennis playing field, which was popular at the time.

Several everyday objects were employed in constructing the game. They used a line of books as a net, rackets were lids from cigar boxes, and the ball was made from a champagne cork.

Things have changed since then and thanks to Northamptonshire Sport's involvement, our U3A now has two table tennis groups and is looking for a third.

So where did it all start?

Back in March 2013, Greg Yarnall, a Sports Development Officer with Northamptonshire Sport (see sidebar) approached Northampton U3A with a view to setting up a table tennis group.

This was a fantastic opportunity. They helped us find a venue (Greg was a county and league player) and provided equipment and some coaching – the complete 'package'.

In our 27-year history, to my knowledge, this was the first time any outside organisation had approached us to offer help and assistance in setting up a group.

As is normal in such matters the committee had first to identify a group leader (me), who would then work closely with Greg in getting the group up and running. There were a few 'trials and tribulations'. One of them was when the venue we had agreed to use let us down.

This meant having to find a new place just as we were about to 'go live' which turned out to be a blessing in disguise, because we approached Lings Forum



Table Tennis at Northampton U3A

Sports Centre (which is managed by the Borough Council) and they offered us a better deal, with far better playing conditions and a car park on site.

While this organising was going on in the background, I was collecting names of members who would be interested in joining the group and before long they numbered 20 so we had 'lift off'.

Lings rented us a court and the table tennis tables, Greg supplied the group with 12 table tennis bats and some balls, plus a coach for the first two sessions.

Because not everyone could attend Wednesday, I decided to run another group and on Monday 24 June 2013, a year ago now, the first session was held. We had complete novices to 'senior league' players attending and we had a great time.

With word-of-mouth advertising, both groups quickly became oversubscribed and with playing for two hours, twice a week, it became imperative to find another group leader to share the workload, plus deputies for both groups, and this was achieved in November.

At the same time, our Committee members were looking to set-up another table tennis group because of the waiting list – a classic Zero to Hero group formation. We had become the second largest (next to walking) in our U3A.

Because the session charge more than covers the hall/table hire costs, we use the surplus to fund: table tennis balls, bat

cleaning fluid, the occasional coaching session, and as we did in January a free month – which goes down well.

On average, there are 10-15 players of mixed ages and abilities at each session, with no aspirations for being the best player or joining a league. It's about learning/improving a skill and having some fun. Mind you, two hours of table tennis does help with your general fitness and bringing a drink is essential.

So my thanks to all concerned for making it yet another great U3A group. We even have people who, seeing us play at Lings, joined U3A just so they could join the group. That's a bonus!

For more information:

www.u3a-northampton.co.uk

Click the 'groups' tag on the home page, then click on table tennis 2 and you can send me an e-mail.

Northamptonshire Sport

A partnership of organisations working together to provide opportunities for everyone to be able to access and participate in sport, physical activity and recreation

Contact details:

John Dryden House, 8-10 The Lakes
Bedford Road, Northampton, NN4 7YD

Tel: 01604 366976

info@northamptonshiresport.org