

Jan Fuller – Women & Girls Ambassador

Theme: Women & Girls / Physical Wellbeing / Mental Wellbeing / Individual Development / Social & Community development

Weekly/twice weekly training and coaching sessions improved not only my game, but my fitness and my confidence. I joined the league again, met up with many old faces who had never left the game, my table tennis improved slowly but surely, and I loved every minute of it.

Background Information

My whole family played table tennis so as a child I remember going with my mum and dad to matches and watching them play. It was a natural progression for me to start playing. I don't remember at what age I started to play but by the time I reached Senior school I was playing in the Redbridge league and beating my teachers at school.

Around 1988 at the age of 29 years I stopped playing table tennis and Squash took over as my sport of choice. It would be another 25 years before I picked up a bat again.

In 2012, I was diagnosed with Parkinsons Disease, a condition which changed my life, I wasn't playing any sport at that time on a regular basis. In 2015 I realised I needed to do more exercise for my physical and mental wellbeing and dusted off my old table tennis bat.

I became interested in coaching as it had been so useful in reintroducing me to the game and I took and passed my Level 1 coaching certificate in 2017.

The following year I was playing in the Chelmsford League and was inspired and recruited to help them run a women and girls 6-week summer course, they wanted as many female coaches as possible and role models to help mentor and support the women and girls attending.

I did this and really enjoyed working with girls who were total beginners and helping others young and old to improve. It was then I realised what a specific set of issues there are for females coming into table tennis.



I had played within a family unit and grown up playing my brother and his mates, so playing in front of or with males was not a problem for me, plus I was a reasonable standard and so I was not intimidated by them. Many of the girls were self-conscious and embarrassed easily, they felt more secure learning in a female-only environment and with female fellow players. Some of those beginners now play in British League Junior teams.

Unfortunately, as my game improved, my Parkinson's on the other hand got slowly worse, but table tennis kept me going and kept me mentally and physically as fit as possible. Parkinson's UK recommend a minimum of exercise time of 150 hours a week. I am sure that without the motivation to play table tennis my condition would have been even worse. Ironically having Parkinson's has opened new table tennis opportunities for me.

I play now at a standard that is higher than I ever reached before, Sometimes the Parkinsons will prevent me from playing due to Dystonic spasms in my feet and legs which render me unable to walk, they are unpredictable and frustrating, but my clubs/clubmates at Norwich City TTC and Bracecamp and are all very understanding and supportive, which helps enormously.

I noticed one day on the TTE website that there was a TT session starting in Ipswich for people with Parkinsons, run by Parkinsons TT UK and supported by Parkinson's UK and TTE. I went to the session and from there my world of TT and Parkinsons merged. I attended the UK National Tournament they ran in August 2021, held at St Neots, and won a Gold and a Silver in the two Open singles events. Following my success at the Nationals I was asked to attend the Parkinsons World TT Championship in Berlin in September 2021 representing England. I did so, and won the Ladies Singles, came runner up in the mixed doubles and lost in the semi-final in the ladies' doubles, resulting in a haul of gold, silver and bronze medals.

What now?

I will continue to play for as long as I physically can, and I still want to improve and to strive to be 'the best I can be' at table tennis.

Me and my dad (who also has Parkinsons) have set up a Parkinsons Bat and Chat session (in Norfolk), for people living with Parkinsons and their partners. To support the sessions, we have received a Level the Table grant to set up and run this. It is incredibly rewarding to see how much the 'regulars' who come each month to play and meet others benefit.

I have become a Woman and Girls Ambassador with TTE and would like to be doing my L2 coaching course at the end of the year in Colchester. However, I do need to be mindful of the limitations Parkinsons inflicts upon the levels of energy I have and be sensible about how much I take on at a time.

I went to Scotland on the 6th of August 2022 with my coach – Stewart Laws (Level 3 Head coach from Norwich City TT Club and won Gold in the Ladies event and lost in the Semi-final in the Open, eventually coming 4th.

Since I started to play again in 2015, my table tennis journey has included Parkinsons as my (unchosen) doubles partner, however, I have grown so much as a person, playing the game I love, despite of and because of Parkinsons that I cherish the experiences and journey we have had together thus far.

I want to develop the Woman and Girls side of my TT and I am eager to help others with a disability get back to or have a go at TT. I am blessed with a fantastic support network, my dad, mum and brother. My able-bodied friends and my Parkinsons friends, not to mention a huge TT family, from my teammates and opposition players to the 'Vetts TT' family.

