



## LIFE MEMBERSHIP NOMINATION

### Noel Shorter

#### BIOGRAPHY

Noel Shorter has been involved in table tennis since 1955. In that time, he has fulfilled many roles, including, but not limited to, Player, Coach / Non-Playing Captain, Businessman, Administrator / Promoter, National Selector, Team Manager and Technical Adviser.



*Ann Middleton and Noel Shorter meeting with Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai in 1971 on a tour of China with the Australian Table Tennis Team.<sup>1</sup>*

- **Player**

Commencing table tennis in 1955 at Petersham and Bondi Junction Table Tennis Academies, Noel was coached by Michael Szabados and former Australian Champion Bill Lodge. He played "A Grade" and participated in exhibition matches with Michael Szabados, Cliff McDonald and other leading players.

Noel opened Table tennis academies in Rockdale and Burwood.

When the Summer Hill Table Tennis Centre opened in the mid 1960's, with 25 tables and a coffee shop, Noel was appointed as the Manager by the owner, George Saharov.

After the death of Michael Szabados, Noel took over the exhibition circuit arranging exhibitions in clubs, shopping malls and at the Sydney Royal Easter Show and the Royal Melbourne Show.

- **Coach / Non-Playing Captain**

As the first manager of the Summer Hill Table Tennis Centre, Noel was involved in the establishment of a club for juniors which achieved a membership of about 400. To encourage juniors to participate there was a joining fee which entitled the kids to come and play after school for free.

Whilst watching the juniors, Noel recognised that they required assistance in developing table tennis skills which then led to his interest in coaching. From this club for juniors he was approached by a 13-year-old youngster named Paul Pinkewich who wanted to win and be coached. This began a long association with Paul who he coached for almost his entire career and which also led to a business association.

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<sup>1</sup> Ping-pong diplomats opened door to China (2014, May 26). The Australian. Retrieved March 02, 2018, from <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/50th-birthday-news/pingpong-diplomats-opened-door-to-china/news-story/f11ddef94d761eb87209dcaa7f7e6292>

Along with Paul, Noel coached other young players who went on to win Australian Junior Titles. One of these players was Gary Haberl.

Noel was being approached by players, Steve Knapp, Bob Tuckett, Ann McMahon (later Ann Middleton) and Greg Thomas for coaching. As these players all lived interstate, Noel encouraged them to move to Sydney where he established the “Elite Training Group”. For this group Noel arranged specialist training in Japan under the guidance of former world champion (later ITTF President), Ichiro Ogimura. These players formed the basis of the team which ultimately reached Number 12 in the World.

In 1971, Noel was appointed Coach and Non-Playing Captain of the Australian Men’s teams playing in the Commonwealth Championships in Singapore and the World Championships in Nagoya, Japan.

Following the World Championships in Nagoya, Noel, as Coach, accompanied the team, comprising Paul Pinkewich, Steve Knapp and Ann McMahon, and the group leader, ATTA President, Dr. John Jackson of Adelaide, on the highly publicised “Ping Pong Diplomacy” tour of China. This tour attracted enormous media publicity which the game had never seen before.

After these tours Noel concentrated on privately coaching Paul Pinkewich, Dennis Makaling, Russell Lavale and Gary Haberl. In 1983 Gary became one of the youngest Australian Men’s Champions when he was 18 years of age.

- **Businessman**

In 1971 Noel established an equipment sales business called International Table Tennis Pty Ltd, later as Combined Sports Traders and Aussie Table Tennis. The business was initially set up as the Australian distributor for equipment manufactured by Stiga, Yasaka and Nittaku companies, with other brands added later.

Noel’s partner in the business was Paul Pinkewich who has since set up his own table tennis company.

Noel sold his shares in the table tennis business in 2008 but still works part time for the new owners, Aussie Table Tennis.

- **Administrator / Promoter**

From 1976 to 1980 Noel was Secretary of Table Tennis NSW. During this period, he organised an Australian Open Championships which were held in Sydney during the first year of his term, and a major international tournament which ran over the three-year period 1977 to 1979.

***The Wills International Tournament***

With an initial sponsorship of (then) \$30,000, “The Wills International”, a major international tournament, was born in 1977. The tournament was played along the lines of the famous “Pot Black Snooker” and, in its first year, was played at the Summer Hill Table Tennis Centre in Sydney.

The ABC television network aired the event on TV over 16 weeks on Thursday evenings with a replay on Saturday afternoons. It greatly boosted interest in table tennis and

included overseas players Dennis Neale (England) and Toshiaki Furukawa (Japan) who played a fantastic final.

In 1978, following the success of the initial tournament, the sponsors indicated that they would like to upgrade the event. Noel approached the Sydney Opera House. The Manager of the Opera House liked the idea and provided a recording room that could hold approximately 1,000 spectators and which was ideal for TV coverage. For the 1978 tournament Noel arranged for world champions Stellan Bengtsson and Kjell Johansson, both of Sweden, Dennis Neale of England and Toshiaki Furukawa of Japan to participate.

The success of this tournament saw the “Singapore Airlines Classic” held in Geelong and Melbourne with TV coverage and again was very successful. Sponsorship from the airline was in the form of a contra-deal travel arrangement for the players.

In 1979 both sponsors decided to switch the Wills International from Sydney to Melbourne and the Singapore Airlines event to Sydney. Sadly, the attendances were not as good as they were in 1978.

Unfortunately, due to a number of factors, further events could not be arranged. An interesting fact was that the ABC and Wills could not come to an agreement on the location of cigarette advertising signage for the television coverage.

### ***National League Team***

In the mid 1990's, Noel, with the assistance of several friends, established a team in the National Table Tennis League called the “Sydney Smashers”. The Smashers attracted excellent crowds for home games and when Sydney hosted the finals in 1996, Noel arranged for the finals to be held at Sydney Centrepoint Tower. It was the best attended final series in the history of the league.

- **National Selector**

In the mid 1980's Noel served as a National Selector for a period of two years.

- **Team Manager**

In 1991 Noel went to the Commonwealth Table Tennis Championships in Nairobi, Kenya, as Manager of the Men's and Women's teams.

- **Technical Advisor**

In 1998 Noel was appointed as Technical Operations Manager at SOCOG (the Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games), responsible for the setup of the State Sports Centre where table tennis was to be played.

In the lead-up to the Olympics, the staging of a “Test Event” (being the ITTF Pro Tour Final) was required in order to identify potential issues prior to staging the Olympics. The only issue identified was regarding the flooring and this was rectified for the Olympics. There was concern crowd numbers would be small for the ITTF Pro Tour Final because in previous years Paris had only attracted 400 and Sweden 200. Noel used his many contacts in the Chinese community and in the table tennis clubs in and around Sydney to sell tickets, resulting in an audience of over 3,000.

For the Olympics and the Para Olympics, Noel was responsible for the setup and maintenance of flooring and tables in the field of play and in the training area, lighting, nightly cleaning of the floor, training of volunteers, gluing area, etc.

Noel worked closely with the Competition Manager, Neil Harwood, ITTF officials, representatives from the Athens and Beijing Olympic Committees and a strong management team. It was with a high degree of satisfaction for Noel that the ITTF President, Adam Sharara described the table tennis competition in Sydney as “the best ever”.

After the Olympics Noel returned to his business and continued to sponsor many players including William Henzell, Simon Gerada, Scott Houston and others from junior to national team level.

In 2016 Noel was interviewed for the National Archives in Canberra and was also made a Life Member of TTNSW.

When asked about his life in table tennis, Noel said “Since commencing table tennis in 1955 I have gained many friends and wonderful memories. My best experiences being the "Ping Pong Diplomacy", the Wills Tournaments and the chance to work on the Sydney Olympics which was a once in a life time opportunity.”

## **TESTIMONIAL**

*Provided by Dennis Makaling, Former National Champion and Oceania Champion*

I met Noel Shorter for the very first time in 1985 through Igor Klaf as Igor was coaching me for a while. Noel (through Yasaka TT) sponsored the Riversdale / Yasaka Easter Junior Tournament in 1985 and I fortunately won the Under 15 and Under 17 Boys Singles on the same day. During that tournament, Igor introduced me to Noel and it was history from there; I was sponsored by Yasaka / Stiga from that day until the day I retired in 1995.

Because I lived in Victoria and Noel lived in NSW, constant communication with Noel was held by phone almost every week during training with the National Academy under the National Coach Zhou Lan Sun. I always said that Lan Sun had a big influence on my game through gruelling training sessions, but Noel always gave me the mental strength needed to win big matches. I can honestly say that I may not have won the two Australian Men's Singles titles in 1991 and 1992 without Noel's valuable insight into the mental aspect of table tennis and his mentorship.

To my dear friend Noel Shorter, you truly deserve TTA Life Membership.