

Unstinting service to sports administration

Merv Allardyce

sports administrator
b September 4, 1931
d July 11, 2020

Merv Allardyce had 72 unbroken years as a sports administrator, highlighted by his ever-willing service to the Empire Table Tennis Club in Petone as a player, coach and organiser.

Noted for his generosity to others, he joined Empire in 1969, when he already had 22 years of sports administration experience behind him, and was still organising play at its midweek club until just before his death this month, aged 88.

That sporting service stretched back to when he was elected club captain of his Whanganui cricket club at the age of just 16. For those next 72 years, he was involved in some form of sports administration, including 11 years as executive director of Table Tennis New Zealand, a full-time paid position.

Allardyce was also chairman or secretary of Wanganui Table Tennis, Manawātū Cricket, Manawātū Table Tennis, and served in various roles at Empire, including 21 years as chairman.

He had a special interest in coaching and worked with players ranging in age from octogenarians to primary school children. He was coaching convener for the New Zealand association before being appointed executive director.

Allardyce is the only person to have attended all three of Table Tennis New Zealand's jubilee celebrations – 25th in 1958, 50th in 1984 and 75th in 2009.

But he never neglected his obligations at club level. It was here that his practical hands-on skills were utilised. Within months of joining Empire he pitched



Merv Allardyce at his beloved Empire Table Tennis Club in 2001 and, right, at a family function just a week before his death.

headlong into the physical work required to complete a major extension to the club premises in 1970. In later years he was equally energetic with painting and joinery work and the pinnacle of his club contribution was serving as project manager for the building's most recent extension in 2008.

He was honoured with life membership of both Table Tennis New Zealand and the Empire club. Hutt City Council presented him with a civic award

for his services to sport.

Mervyn George Allardyce was born in Whanganui and educated at St Anthony's School and St Augustine's College. He began work in an accountancy firm and moved first to Palmerston North and later to Lower Hutt, continuing in the same profession.

He married Margaret, and they had four children: Diane, David, Andrew and John.

Allardyce made a career move in the

1970s and with a business partner set up a mobile tyre repair operation. In 1986 he became one of the few people in New Zealand earning a living from table tennis, when appointed national executive director. He retired from that position in 1996.

As a player Allardyce represented Manawātū and was a strong interclub competitor in his Hutt Valley years. Later he competed regularly at the NZ veterans championships, often returning laden

with medals.

The entire Allardyce family played table tennis competitively, with David ranked fourth best junior in New Zealand in 1990, later playing professionally in Germany. In 1970 Margaret set up the Empire midweek morning club which has functioned ever since.

After his retirement Merv dedicated untold hours to Empire. He oversaw a major administrative restructure in 1997 and served on the club board until 2005. He continued physical maintenance work well into retirement age and continued to coach at the midweek club and the Friday junior club.

And he would unhesitatingly respond to invitations to coach at the Tawa club, many kilometres away. Just before his death he was still the main organiser of the Empire midweek club.

His other major interest was his church. He served as finance director, sometimes through difficult years, for Our Lady of the Rosary Catholic parish in Waiwhetu.

Although stricken intermittently by heart and breathing problems since 2008, he remained physically active till the end of his life. He was admitted to hospital on July 8, but was able to enjoy a video chat with John, Diane and David two days later. He died the next morning.

Always generous and willing to help, his joviality, wry sense of humour and warm personality won him a vast array of friends. He will be missed enormously by his extended family, his church, his table tennis club and many others. – *By John Kiley*

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