



Paul Rickard

The English Schools' Football Association is extremely sad to announce the passing of a long serving and dedicated Council Member for the Midlands, Paul Rickard. Paul passed away at his home on the night of 18/19 May 2020 of a pulmonary embolism.

Paul began his journey through schools' football as a young player with his primary school in Camelford Station in Cornwall, a home county of which he was intensely proud. Such roots meant he had to be exposed to the oval ball game too and despite showing talent here also his preference remained with association football. He played for every school he attended and even played in the ESFA U15 Trophy for Eastleigh when the family moved to Hampshire. In addition to his team game attributes Paul was also a promising athlete representing Hants in the National Cross Country Championships in 1968 – how those little legs must have been worked!

After qualifying to teach both Physical Education and Technology, Paul secured a post at Abbey High School in Redditch where he soon became immersed in the organisation and administration of county football. Under the nurturing of Ron Davies and Adrian Riddiford, Paul was recruited to the Hereford and Worcestershire set up as 'county secretary'. He soon became deeply involved with the U19 county team and was pivotal in taking them back to the ESFA Skegness Festival where he came under the spell of the 'South West Spirit', not a drink but a camaraderie like no other. It became so important to Paul that one year, when the county could not raise a team to attend, he took it upon himself to spend the week there on his own just so that Hereford and Worcestershire were represented! This was the time that legends began as Paul's farmyard impressions entertained everyone – the chicken, staggering, the sheep (with his sheepskin coat turned inside out) absolutely unforgettable.

With the ESFA restructure in 1993 the two counties split, Hereford going to the South West region and Worcestershire into the Midlands. Paul stood for election to the ESFA Council in the Midlands and was elected. Paul's diversity of skills were welcomed at the ESFA and he became an important part of the U18 set up taking complete control of the selection procedures in the Midland Counties and a member of the International Selection Committee. He also had important contributions to make to numerous ESFA groups at times chairing the media, rules and referees committees. Paul attended all of our summer coaching courses and was instrumental in making sure that they were rewarding for everyone both on and off the field of play. He was tireless and considerate in his efforts to reassure concerned parents that their offspring would be well looked after in his care. He never let them down. Paul was also a key member of the ESFA U18 Festival Organising Committee making sure that the enjoyment he had as a manager was passed on to the next generation. There are still many members of the teaching profession today who speak fondly of Festival.

Paul had the good fortune to accompany the ESFA U18 team on numerous foreign visits. As well as cementing good relationships with the home countries, Republic of Ireland and European opponents Paul was also fortunate to join tours to the USA and Singapore/Malaysia. In the US, in his year as Chairman of the ESFA, he was an incredible ambassador wherever he went, being the life and soul of numerous gatherings, representing English school sport with thoughtful humour and gaining the respect of everyone. One unforgettable memory of this lifelong Kinks fan was in Atlanta, USA, in a packed bar with a live band and a little English bloke decides he is going to give them a song – introducing it as 'by the greatest Rock and Roll singer ever, Ray Davies'. The band instantly stopped and said, 'Hey buddy have you not heard of Elvis?' He sang it well though and was everyone's buddy after that

Paul looked upon taking the ESFA U18 team to play Wales in Truro, Cornwall as one of his greatest achievements. Along with his SW Council colleagues it gave him immense satisfaction to bring international football to his home county for the first time. Standing next to him at the pre match rendition of Trelawney, the Cornish National Anthem, I thought he was going to burst!

Since his retirement from full time teaching, Paul continued to devote his time to schools' football serving on the ESFA's competitions committee and also acting as a Trustee of the Association. His tolerant and patient approach helped overcome numerous difficult situations and he was at his best when putting people at ease.

In the time he had spare for his family and others, Paul was a keen skier and 'developing' golfer. No mountain too high or problem too great. There was always a solution to be found and a good few laughs to have along the way.

Paul leaves his wife, Ann, who has been unreservedly supportive in Paul's schools' football activities and children Matthew and Emma. A massive void to fill but an abundance of happy memories.

Rest in Peace, Paul.



Written by Dave Woollaston and Stuart Inger for the ESFA