

Top award for table tennis champ Shaun

Hordle table tennis star Shaun Newcomb has won a prestigious national table tennis award. Shaun was honoured by the English Table Tennis Association with an Equality Award for his significant contribution to promoting table tennis to those with a disability and to other minority groups.

The New Milton TTC and Waterside TTC player was left paralysed as a result of a road accident which left him wheelchair bound and he only took up table tennis in 2000. Since that time Shaun's achievements in the sport, both as a player and in his quest to promote the game to others, with or without a disability, have been outstanding and inspirational.

Shaun plays locally for Waterside TTC in Southampton's first division and for New Milton TTC in Bournemouth's second division, last season gaining over 70% and 80% averages respectively against non-disabled opposition. He competes in wheelchair tournaments both nationally and internationally and in the last two national Grand Prix events he has won gold in the open, class singles and doubles. Last year he competed in several internationals including Argentina where he won silver.

He gained a Level Two coaching certificate in 2003 and has adapted his knowledge to coach people with various disabilities including a regular post at the Spinal Injuries Centre at Salisbury Hospital where the sport is as much about rehabilitation as it is about recreation. Three wheelchair players are currently benefiting from coaching sessions with Shaun, all of whom have an excellent chance of qualifying and medalling at the Paralympics at London 2012.

Waterside TTC chairman Colin French who nominated Shaun for the award said: "Shaun is always smiling and keen to help enthuse others to our sport. He is an excellent ambassador and deserves the Equality Award. At club level, Shaun is always quick to establish a new player's level of expertise and devises appropriate exercises which bring rapid improvement, so enthusing the pupil. These people are mostly without disability and being taught by a wheelchair player surely defines equality in sport."

Shaun is on the ETTA's Equality Committee and he was recently elected as vice chairman of the British Table Tennis Association Disabilities and sits on their technical support group.

A humble Shaun told the Advertiser: " I was happy to accept the award but I'm sure there are a lot of other people more worthy. If I can use the award to raise the profile of table tennis in the area and increase the participation in the sport I would be very happy."

New Milton Table Tennis Club has seen significant growth recently and would like the opportunity to expand to bigger premises. They currently meet on Sunday evenings at 6.30 pm in Sway Village Hall and new members are always welcome.