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Cherished Memories – Peter ‘Pro’ Ellis

THE minute’s silence that was held in Peter Ellis’ memory before all the club’s four games on Saturday June 18, 2022 reflected a profound respect. People who knew him were aware of what he gave to the club in more than 50 years association.

It was also right and proper that Lilian, his son Richard, and grandson Jack were there. For them and other members of the family this is a painful time. They will need space more than anything. When such a person dies, time is needed for adjustment. For Peter’s family, there is pride in a life well lived.

Peter was born in Lewisham, Kent in September 1932. Then, possessions were few and children had to show resource in finding their own entertainment. There was no TV. Peter would get another boy Colin (next door neighbour) to play cricket in the street and they would rope Peter’s sister Yvonne (17 months younger than Peter) in to be a fielder.

Peter was not quite seven when war was declared. After going to Paddington, Peter and his sister Yvonne were sent to Ampthill as children were evacuated from London in 1940. Peter at times recalled the noise and terror created by the bombs and listening to him, one could only guess at the terror he, his family and millions went through.

Peter’s mother was a strong influence on his life. She gave him discipline and structure. In her later years I met her when she lived in the house that Peter bought for her in Hoddesdon. She was a gregarious woman like Yvonne, while Peter was shyer but he had a dry sense of humour. On the rare occasion I cut the grass for her, Peter’s mother made sure I had a strong cup of tea at the end.

I have digressed. After Peter returned to London, he attended Marylebone Grammar School. In adult life, Peter showed a facility for numbers particularly when it related to business. He also had a feel for words, but it would be fair to say that Sport sparked his attention more than the classroom.

Wally Hammond and Len Hutton were his childhood cricket heroes, and both scored Test triple hundreds. Wanting to get involved in Cricket after showing promise as a fast bowler at school, Peter wrote to Lord’s and got a trial. He was taken on in the Lord’s ground staff where he spent several years in and around National Service with the RAF.

His period at Lord’s was at a time when there was still the divide between amateurs and professionals, and all the class differences and bad feeling that entailed.

This did stay with Peter in later years, but he put this behind him to forge a good career in the Scottish leagues. Ellis was a pro at three clubs where he played for Clackmannan County, Drumpelier Cricket Club (in Glasgow) and Ferguslie. His best year came with Ferguslie when he took 54 wickets at an average of around just seven. He was also a big run scorer. At around this time Peter was also embarking on honing his squash and rackets skills in the winter.

After his time in the Scottish leagues, he found employment in another formal setting in Haileybury College in Hertford Heath. Here he made his mark as a squash, rackets and cricket professional. He is recalled by many people for his wit and his favourite sayings. Talking to a moderate bowler who was bowling long hops continuously he would quip, with his head shaking, “I would not know how to bowl a bad ball”. More importantly people knew he was a sound coach, and the rackets honours are a testament to that. Wisden cricketer Almanacks from the mid-1960s to mid-1990s testify to his position as the Cricket Professional.



In and around his school coaching, he would run a sports shop as well as stringing rackets for sports shops or for people directly as well as coaching at Hoddesdon Squash Club. From memory, this was mostly in the late 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s, when squash experienced a boom. Property was also an area that Peter focused on and he relished his

image of an entrepreneur, he loved Minder and Arthur Daley and the London money sayings such as ‘score’ ‘pony’ or ‘monkey’. Peter would rub his hands gleefully and shake his head vigorously when these were mentioned. I genuinely felt Peter fancied himself as George Cole. He also loved listening to classical music on the way to matches in his Peugeot or yellow MG. ‘Superb’ or ‘class’ would be uttered intermittently as he drove seamlessly on the motorways.

This brings me on to St Margaretsbury. He told me joined in the late 1960s and he would influence many lives, particularly younger players seeking advice and help. Peter will be remembered by older members for his playing ability and was fondly known as the ‘Pro’. A shrewd medium pacer with a devilish leg-cutter he could run through teams on green wickets, and on batting friendly surfaces, he could keep good batsmen quiet. A highlight was being a member of the 1985 side that won division one of the Herts League after the club had started in the league in 1982. As a young team secretary (in 1985) who lived in Watford during the week at the time, I was very pleased to have his help and advice when things got tricky. He was good enough to appear for the first team after turning 60.



‘Peter at his Haileybury leaving do’

Peter was also a highly proficient batsman and was an exquisite late cutter and puller, but he preferred to let others have a go as he bowled a lot. He did not want to hog things and did his bit running teams. He captained the Sundays 1s in the mid-1980s before later skipping the Sunday 2s. Administration was not his strong point and nor was time-keeping, but he did his utmost to ensure everybody had a game.

Peter was known for his dry sense of humour, and this was shown when he was a cricket representative on the club’s Sports and Social Committee. As he had no officer role, he could indulge in the odd bit of mickey taking. After stopping playing after 2006, Peter continued to take an interest in local cricket and was also well known at Hertford CC and Hoddesdon. His son Richard played for the club prior to and after his spell in professional cricket while his grandson Jack is now a club regular after playing for the club in his teenage years.

However, I should not finish without mentioning Peter’s rock, Lilian. They were married for more than 62 years and Lilian’s love came to the fore in the last few years when Peter struggled with his health. As a couple they always made me feel welcome when I visited them, and my main thoughts are with her. She has worked so tirelessly for Peter and I hope she can have some peace.

