

## The best present ever...



It was a Saturday in the late 60's and we were shopping in Aylesbury. Dad, Mum, Steve and me. I probably didn't want to be there. Steve probably didn't want to be there. Dad probably didn't want to be there. I expect Mum was having a great time. A day out, with all of her boys. It was to change my life forever.

We wandered into a small toy shop that could be found the length and breadth of the country and there it was. Subbuteo. All bright green and vibrant. Little plastic men. Footballers. Little plastic footballers. How much they were going to impact on my life, no one would have believed. Dad bought us two teams, a pair of goals and a ball. Steve, being the oldest, chose team reference 16. Arsenal. Little plastic men. Little plastic footballers. I was the youngest, I could choose any team. Except reference 16. Arsenal. I chose reference 5. Manchester City. I have no idea why I choose Manchester City. They cost Dad 9 shillings and 11 old pence. They were the best present ever. I couldn't wait to get home. Later that afternoon we had the first of many Arsenal v Manchester City matches on the lounge carpet. I lost. I always lost. I was the youngest.

Dad had a friend and work colleague who lived down the road. Terry Power. Terry had two sons, Chris and Derek, each a year older than me and Steve. Terry had a proper pitch on a proper board on a proper table. They played proper rules. I still lost. I was the youngest. I didn't care, I loved it and wanted to play all of the time which I did. During the summer holidays we had an estate league. I lost every game and came last. I went home in tears but Dad was always understanding and supportive. He always encouraged me with whatever I was doing.

Towards the end of 1973 Dad and Steve drove me to Dunstable to play in my first ever official Subbuteo tournament. The Subbuteo World Cup. The winner would progress to the regional event and then the national event and then on to Germany for the 1974 Subbuteo World Cup finals. I got to the final but lost 1-2 to a boy who was much older than me. I lost. I was the youngest. I continued to play whenever I could and became close friends with a like a minded lad on my estate. Phil Holmes. He was a few months older than me. I lost. I lost all the time to Phil. For two years. I was the youngest. In 1976 we formed the Milton Keynes Table Soccer Club and Dad helped us produce the newsletter. Pure Gold. It was printed on bright orange/ gold paper. Dad liked Phil and Phil liked Dad.

We joined the English Table Soccer Association and played on proper tables with proper rules and proper referees. I stopped losing. I started winning. I was a winner. Dad loved hearing of my adventures and met a lot of my 'Subbuteo' friends. Some years later our family business Queensway Print organised and sponsored the Queensway Print Invitational Open and players came from Europe. I beat the great Dominic Demarco in the final 1-0. My Dad presented the trophies. He was embarrassed. I was ecstatic. I think he was proud inside. I went on to be the youngest ever English National League champion and won multiple championships and titles making hundreds of friends all over the world. All thanks to my old Dad and nine shillings and eleven old pence.

The best present ever...

In fond memory of my Dad, Don Varney - ahead of the 2024 FISTF Subbuteo World Cup, fifty years after my 1974 Subbuteo World Cup qualifier - by Bob Varney.