

BILL NEELY BIOGRAPHY

Bill Neely was born in Livingston, Tennessee in 1932. At the age of two his family moved to Crossville, Tennessee where he attended grade and high school in the Cumberland County School System. Bill was an excellent high school athlete and played the only school sports available—basketball and football. He was named to the Upper Cumberland All Conference football team during his senior year and graduated from Cumberland County High School in 1950.

After high school, he enrolled in Tennessee Tech (now Tennessee Technology University). He played on the freshman football team and other intramural sports teams. He had an interrupted college career at Tech, but won all of the intramural table tennis tournaments while there.

In 1953 while living in Akron, Ohio and shortly after marriage to Joan Keene, he was drafted into the U.S. Army. This was during the Korean Conflict. He received infantry basic training and completed military police and leadership schools at Camp Gordon, Georgia. By the time his training was complete, the hostilities in Korea had ended, and he spent the remainder of his army tour as the military police desk sergeant in the Town Patrol Division at Newport News, Virginia.

Upon discharge from the military in 1955, Bill returned to Akron, Ohio where he enrolled in the University of Akron's School of Engineering and played on the junior varsity basketball team. In 1956, he returned to Tennessee Tech. He graduated in 1958 with a BS degree in Civil Engineering and was employed by a consulting engineering firm designing interstate highways in the Memphis, Tennessee area.

In 1960 he took a position with the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) designing hydro and fossil power generating facilities and began work on a Masters Degree in Structural Engineering at the University of Tennessee. In 1962 he left TVA and went to work for an aerospace company in Huntsville, Alabama. He spent five years designing ground support equipment primarily for the Saturn I, IB, and V—all launch vehicles of the Apollo Program. During this time, he continued work on his Masters Thesis, commuting back and forth to the University in Knoxville, Tennessee. In 1965 he was awarded the Masters Degree in Civil Engineering with majors in Structural Engineering and Engineering Mechanics.

After brief stints as Manufacturing Director at SPACO in Huntsville and employment with General Electric's Aircraft Engineering Group in Evendale, Ohio, he returned to Huntsville where he initiated and managed the program for seismic testing for nuclear power plant equipment for Wyle Laboratories. Nuclear power was big at this time and in 1973 he was again recruited by TVA where he managed the Pipe Break Analysis Program for several years. When he retired from TVA in 1992, he managed the Facilities Group where he was responsible for civil, electrical, and landscape architect activities for all corporate facilities. He worked two more years as an engineering contractor involved in the replacement of underground fuel storage tanks for the U. S. Air Force, before retiring from engineering for good in 1994.

Following a 31-year table tennis layoff and after retirement he resumed playing table tennis. He played on a regular basis, both recreationally and competitively and his passion for the sport blossomed. As a senior player, he has won more than 190 awards, medals, trophies and plaques. He has won senior tournaments in district, state, national and international events, multiple times.

Since 1994 Bill has played in 96 United States American Table Tennis (USATT) sanctioned tournaments, winning 592 matches. The USATT is the governing body for the Olympic sport of table tennis in the United States. The USATT has more than 300 sanctioned table tennis clubs (three in Tennessee) and more

than 8000 members. Based on sanctioned tournament results, the USATT maintains ratings and rankings for its members.

During 2006 and 2007, with his close-to-the-table-long-pip kills, his average USATT rating was above 1900 with the highest being 1975. In open competition against all players, a rating of 2000 is considered an expert player. Thus, a rating above 1900 is exceptional for someone past 70 years old. From 2000 through 2011, he was nationally ranked in the top five of his active USATT age groupings and for a four-months stretch was ranked first in the nation. Two major national USATT sanctioned tournaments are the U.S. Closed and U.S. Open; each is conducted annually. Bill has won gold medals in his age group five times in the U.S. Closed and six times in the U.S. Open. No other player from Tennessee has ever won a single gold medal in these events.

Some notable wins for Bill in sanctioned tournaments include match victories against Jack Howard, who was Captain of the 1971 nine-player contingent representing the United States under President Nixon's famous Ping Pong Diplomacy with China. Also, Bill beat Marty Reisman who was a world class player and won the US table tennis championships in 1958 and in 1960. Marty operates out of New York and still receives a lot of press. At the time of these competitions with Bill, these two gentlemen were still outstanding senior players with USATT ratings above 1900.

An amazing sidebar to all of Bill's table tennis achievements is that in 1997 he had both knees replaced. In addition, since then he has had three rotator cuff surgeries, one spinal surgery to fuse three vertebrae and two strokes. That's enough to put many normal people in a rocking chair, but not Bill Neely.

Besides USATT sanctioned tournaments, for the past eighteen years Bill has participated in the Senior Olympics or Senior Games. Men and women can compete in three separate table tennis events— singles, doubles and mixed doubles. To participate in the National Senior Games, one needs to be at least fifty years old and one of the top few winners of individual U.S. State Games. To participate in the state games a player is required to be one of the top few winners of state district games. The prizes are patterned after the Olympics, i.e. gold, silver and bronze medals. The maximum number of medals Bill could have won, based on events entered in the state games is 49. He won 49. Only three of these medals were silver, the rest were gold. He collected an equal number of medals in the state district events, and all were gold. Thus, he has won 16 state singles senior table tennis championships and shared in winning 30 more playing in doubles and mixed-doubles for a total of 46 Tennessee state senior table tennis championships. The nationals are held every other year. Bill competed in 16 national events and medaled in 11 of them—one gold, seven silvers and three bronze. By Bill's standards, not great. But still excellent results, since he was competing against state champions from all across the United States.

Bill has competed annually in the Huntsman World Senior Games since 2000. In these games the best senior players in America compete against each other as well as players from other countries. Bill has competed in 27 events and medaled in 23 of them: 10 gold, eight silver and five bronze. The Huntsman World Senior Games were initiated in 1991 and 624 different individuals have competed in table tennis events. Bill ranks high in number of total medals won by all male competitors in these games, and he was first to have won at least 23 in one decade of play.

Bill Neely's contribution to the sport of table tennis extends far beyond his playing achievements. For example, he is a USATT certified coach, umpire and referee and has officiated a number of sanctioned and non-sanctioned events. As in all sports, there are a multitude of table tennis rules and regulations that must be mastered and the certification process involves extensive study and testing. The International Table

Tennis Federation (ITTF) is the governing body for all international table tennis associations and USATT certified umpires are required to be knowledgeable of ITTF rules and regulations. Bill coordinated and led the effort to ensure that at least two nationally certified umpires and referees were located in the table tennis hubs of Tennessee (Memphis, Nashville, Knoxville and Chattanooga).

Bill served continuously as Knoxville Table Tennis Club's (KTTC) president since 1998, until his latest stroke forced his retirement in April, 2012. His tireless energy, dedication to the sport of table tennis and leadership has improved every aspect of KTTC. Some examples follow:

- Grew the KTTC from a rag-tag group of a few players, having marginal equipment and a struggling budget into a bustling, productive organization with USATT tournament grade tables and equipment, plus putting the club on a sound financial footing.
- Relocated the club to the friendly confines of Knoxville's Phyllis Wheatley YWCA.
- Organized and hosted, in association with the University of Tennessee, the ACUI eastern United States collegiate tournaments in 1998, 2001, 2003 and 2006; also hosted the United States 2000 and 2004 National Junior Olympics table tennis tournaments which were held in Knoxville. Hosting means using KTTC furnished equipment and organizing, conducting or helping conduct the events with KTTC volunteers.
- Bill designed KTTC's attractive club shirt, which is known across America. More than 500 of these shirts have been purchased by table tennis players including players from California and Hawaii.
- Organized club training sessions led by nationally acclaimed instructors and coordinated inter-club play with other cities including Chattanooga and Cookeville, TN and Asheville, NC.
- Conducted several Boys & Girls Club tournaments and YWCA table tennis introduction sessions for local youth.
- Annually conducts three USATT sanctioned tournaments in Knoxville. To date, 19 of these tournaments have been conducted. Prior to Bill's presidency, only one USATT sanctioned tournament was ever held in Knoxville.
- Bill's innovative ideas has helped make each of Knoxville's tournaments popular sell-out events with players participating from across America including states as far away as California, Arizona and New York. These ideas included a table-tennis-celebrity series featuring such players as Danny Seemiller, ten-time US national male table tennis champion. Nationally ranked junior and female players also competed in the celebrity series. KTTC has now paid out more than \$30,000 to participants. Traditionally, only the top players win money. Bill initiated a feature of KTTC tournaments called "Gold Dollar Upsets" where an upset by a lower ranked over a higher ranked player provided the upset winner an award of gold dollars. Therefore, a lot of available prize money is awarded to improving players, not just to the top ranked players. The concept is becoming popular and other USATT clubs have copied or plan to copy the idea.
- KTTC was selected as USATT's Club of the Month for June, 2007. The selection is based on merit. Not surprising, clubs having large memberships and located in larger cities are more often selected. No other table tennis club in Tennessee has ever earned this honor, so this was a significant milestone for KTTC.

Bill is currently working with Newgy Industries to make table tennis available to players and non-players across the state of Tennessee. This may be his greatest contribution to Tennessee table tennis. Bill shares the vision of Mr. Joseph Newgarden, owner of Newgy and USATT Hall of Famer, that, for many reasons, table tennis should be available to every person in America. A way to encourage this is to begin in the schools. Both Bill and Joe are dedicated and working to that end by encouraging and developing table tennis programs in many schools throughout the State. To date, the Newgy program has placed, free of charge, 228 quality tables with supporting robots, barriers, nets and paddles in 52 Tennessee schools.

Bill has focused his recent efforts in the Cumberland County area by working with five different high schools and one youth offender's program in providing 28 tables, 12 robots, 80 barriers, dozens of rackets, thousands of balls, player shirts with school-specific logos and colors, and hands-on coaching of the young athletes. All this at no expense to the schools or athletes. Thanks to Bill, there is now in place a Cumberland County area high-school Table Tennis League and competitive tournaments are being held among the participating schools. Hopefully such arrangements will spawn a future national champion—one capable of competing in the international arena.

You name a role in table tennis and Bill has performed it with excellence. To name a few: administrator, tournament director, referee, umpire, player, coach, organizer and ambassador. "The Ambassador" is how a number of senior players refer to Bill at the National Senior Games. One of the reasons Bill is known nationally as an ambassador for the game is he initiated and completed in 2007 the national effort to successfully enshrine his philanthropic friend, Joe Newgarden, in the USATT Hall of Fame. Bill has aggressively mastered all these roles and done so with a special-and-friendly patience, great efficiency and outstanding results. **For the past two decades and perhaps ever in Tennessee history, no one has done more to promote and improve Tennessee table tennis than Bill Neely.**

Bill and wife Joan reside in Knoxville, Tennessee. They have two sons, one daughter, five grandchildren and two great grandchildren.