

Athol Aitken

The Softball News regrets the passing of Athol Aitken, who died suddenly at his home at Red Beach recently.

The following tribute comes from a long-time umpiring colleague, Ray Le Sueur.

Since February 15 1945, when Athol first joined the Auckland Softball Umpires' Association, he has been a fully active member. He was made a life member in 1963 and was in his ninth year a Chief Umpire, and his 31st as an active umpire. He was awarded Softballer of the Year by the Auckland Softball Association their annual prize-giving last April and was a truly deserving recipient.

As a player Athol had been an Auckland and North Island representative and had the distinction of two John Lennon badges with the Eden club. He umpired the first international team to visit New Zealand (from Victoria, Australia) and umpired every visiting team to New Zealand since, except the Oshawa Tony's when the game was rained out.

The Barker Cup is awarded for meritorious service over a period of five years. Athol was awarded this twice, plus a Certificate of Merit for outstanding service. He was a NZ Umpire and had been awarded numerous bars to his NZ Badge by umpiring at national tournaments throughout the country. The Bill Dunstan Trophy, awarded to the umpire who controls the most games in the Auckland Softball Association competitions during any one season was won eleven times by Athol. Some seasons he topped the 100 games mark and had always been in the top six.

Athol went to Mexico with the first New Zealand team to go to the World Championships in 1966, the first umpire to go overseas with a national team.

He was a member of the NZ Rules and Interpretation Committee for many years and had acted as Deputy Chief Umpire at numerous national tournaments. He was Auckland Chief Umpire and had been Appointments and Gradings Officer for the ASUA for many years. He always made himself available for Association and club field days and travelled frequently to lecture clubs and Associations on umpiring whenever asked.

Although Athol had a reputation for being strict he won the respect of coaches and players for his fairness and dedication to the game of softball. He always tried to give his utmost help to his fellow umpires, especially juniors, but expected them to reach and maintain a high standard of umpiring.

(Athol Aitken, an Eden star on the field for many years in their championship and a regular Auckland representative, was another to give his whole life to the game. In 1950-51 he won Lennon and Beatty Cup medals).

A quote from Seph Porteous, one of the early Eden men and later a Waikato stalwart.

"One thing I remember very vividly about Athol Aitken was at the 1949 national club finals and it was a very close game. Athol was in left field, of course, and the batter hit what appeared to be a home run. It would either have evened the score or possible beaten us when Athol came screaming in from the outfield to tell us the runner had missed second base. The umpire agreed and we won the game and it was crucial to us winning the title that year".

Article provided by Trevor Rowse