

RAY AND DEBBIE PESTRIDGE



He is a player, umpire and coach. She is his coach, cheerleader and teammate. Together, Ray and Debbie Pestridge are spreading their love of table tennis across the state.

Ray Pestridge was introduced to table tennis when he was 12, and never looked back. He learned from his father on their dining room table, much to his mother's dismay, and began competing in junior league events across England. As an adult, he sought out clubs and competitions everywhere he lived. He has been competing in the Oklahoma Senior Games since 2002, and now, at age 82, Pestridge competed successfully in another National Senior Games Championship..

At nationals this summer, Ray competed in men's doubles where he finished 4th with partner Glendale Markwell. And though Debbie Pestridge won't be competing, she will be at her husband's side helping him keep to a regimented diet and advising him against his opponents.

Debbie Pestridge, 61, wasn't drawn to table tennis like her husband, but she was drawn to Ray who loves the game. So, she started learning the game. She became Ray's No. 1 cheerleader, adviser, coach and eventually teammate once she was old enough to compete in the Senior Games.

"A lot of couples won't play together because it doesn't work out for them," Debbie Pestridge said. "But Ray isn't like that. He's really good about being encouraging and he has so much fun with the sport that it doesn't turn into tension for us, unless I put the tension on myself."

The Stillwater residents drive to Tulsa and Oklahoma City weekly to play with table tennis clubs across the state. And when they can't make the drive, they play at home, with each other and with the help of a robot that serves to Ray while his wife is working as a Weight Watchers coach.

Ray Pestridge is working on becoming a referee, which would allow him to set up tournaments around the state.

“It’s like playing chess at 30 or 40 miles-per-hour,” Ray Pestridge said. “You’re playing your strengths against someone else’s weakness. It’s really good competition.”

“I do enjoy the game, but for me it’s also good mentally,” Debbie Pestridge said. “Several doctors have said it’s good for dementia and Alzheimer’s... and my mom died from Alzheimer’s so that’s something we can do together that’s fun and helps maintain brain power.”

Oklahoma Senior Games competitions occur annually in September and October. This year, competitions will be held in Oklahoma City, Tulsa, Shawnee, Norman, Yukon and Warr Acres.

Events include three-on-three basketball, track and field, golf, swimming, water walking, 5K and 10K runs, 5K power walk, 5K race walk, bowling, tennis, table tennis, golf croquet, shuffleboard, cycling, cornhole, badminton, archery, pickleball, racquetball, softball and triathlon. Participants age 50 and older will compete in categories by age and gender.

Oklahoma Senior Games qualifies athletes for National Senior Games competition held every two years. About 300 athletes who qualify in 2020 will represent Oklahoma in the National Senior Games competition November 5-18, 2021 in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

For more information visit www.okseniorgames.com or call (405) 821-1500.