

**GBR**

Len Softley

Deceased

Mr Len Softley Passed Away: 03/01/2005

During World War II Len was the driver for an RAF Officer. During the allied landings in Salerno, Italy in September 1943 he lost part of his left leg.

From the 1950s he became involved in BLESMA (British Limbless Ex-Servicemens' Association), taking part in their annual sports events. When BLESMA stopped the sports events due to the advancing ages of its membership, Len started doing other forms of exercise, typically in able-bodied groups. It was during this time that he became interested in volleyball and set about trying to get together a group of amputees from around the UK to practice and train in volleyball. Often during this time the group only had able-bodied opposition. Out of this group the Stoke Amputee Athletic Club (SAAC) was formed, this later became the British Amputee Sports Association (BASA).

As the volleyball team could now take part in competition with other amputee teams from around the World, Len became aware that there was a level of 'unfairness', as countries with recent experiences of war had more and younger amputees available. To make competition fairer he developed the first classification system that was used Internationally in standing volleyball.

Len was a member of the Great Britain Standing Volleyball team in the 1980s and won a Paralympic medal. He was elected to, and remained a member of, for many years, the International Sport Organisation for Disabled (ISOD). He continued to play volleyball well into his 60s and qualified as a referee, the only disabled volleyball referee at the time.

During the 1970s and 80s he worked as a volunteer with the NHS in Northampton providing training to medical staff on dealing with amputees. He also spoke to every amputee or soon to be amputee about life with an artificial limb. (It is a fact that he weighed up the potential for each new amputee to be part of the volleyball squad.)

