

Mr George Finney

26 December 1947 - 22 February 2007

Head Judge of GISGA

George Finney died on Thursday 22 February aged 59, after a long and distressing battle with cancer. He had been Head Judge for GISGA for many years and had served with distinction in the world of schools' gymnastics, all of which was voluntary work done on top of his full-time teaching posts.

George was born and brought up in Lichfield. In his boyhood years he was a church chorister. After his teaching degree in Durham (reading Geography), he moved to the Potteries, where he taught for thirty years at Maryhill Primary School in the immediate vicinity of his home, near Kidsgrove. He was widely respected and much loved in the community, having in some cases taught more than one generation of a family. He was the kind of teacher who gave freely of his time and his personal resources for the benefit of his pupils. George spent many hours before and after school and at weekends coaching his gymnastics teams. They entered major competitions and were often successful at both regional and national levels, in the British Schools Gymnastics Association championships, (BSGA).

George also spent much time coaching and refereeing schools' football and cricket matches. One of his proudest moments was when England footballing great Sir Stanley Matthews accepted his invitation to visit his school, and coach the pupils. George had a passion to help all pupils achieve and it wasn't long before he had the children "eating out of his hand" with his quiet, calm, kind manner, but firm handling, enabling them to make significant progress. He was respected by all the pupils he taught both at Maryhill and also at Castle House, which he joined in later years, because they sensed he cared, listened to them and freely gave of himself.

George was always passionate about music. As an adult he sang with male voice choirs. Another passion was geography and the environment.

Through sport, George became known to many all over the country and forged many lasting friendships. I first met him in Birmingham 1977, at the West Midlands BSGA regional knockout finals. Our schools were equal first and the result had to be decided by the group sequence scores! We were rivals, but soon firm friends, which led to me helping with his voluntary floors and him inspiring my vaulters.



We founded, alongside Sue Jenkins of Wycombe Abbey, the long running Trinity Invitation Gymnastics Championships (21 years), which encompassed both maintained and independent schools. In 1979 the Association we now know as ISGA was founded and in the early 1980's George, who was teaching at Maryhill state school, and therefore ineligible to compete with his teams, became one of our permanent judges and then Head Judge until his death. George became an extremely valued executive committee member of BSGA, founding and organising the UK Floor and Vault Championships, which became very popular and also bringing in many other innovative ideas witnessed by Linda North and myself, who served on the same committee at that time.

Two things about George stand out. He was a true gentleman – truly a gentle person - and he wanted all the children he taught or coached to achieve the very best of which they were capable, in whatever endeavour they were engaged.

George never married. He left a sister, Jean, and an enormous numbers of friends and colleagues who miss him sorely.

June Walden - GISGA Technical Director and ISGA Chairman