
Honorary Life Vice-President John Stiven, Surrey Schools' Swimming Association

Those who know John Stiven all say what an exceptional ambassador he is for aquatic sports, particularly school swimming and his long-standing involvement with English Schools' Swimming Association (ESSA).

John swam at his first Surrey age group competition in 1959. In the decade that followed he competed at many ESSA meets, medalling, winning events and even setting a unique record.

At the 1963 ESSA Inter-Divisional Champs he set a record in the intermediate boys' 100-yards breaststroke – one that still stands because the event distance was later changed.

John went to Loughborough University after leaving school, where he was swimming captain from 1966-69. He represented in both swimming and water polo.

Freshly graduated, he moved into the teaching profession in London from 1969-76. During that time he also worked with ESSA Division 9 [London].

He spent the next eight years in France, sometimes playing water polo and rugby in the Premier Division for the Paris University Club. He represented the Paris Region on a number of occasions.

When John returned to England in 1984, he joined Surrey Schools' Swimming Association and became a member of ESSA Division 11 [Surrey and Kent]. In 1991 he was appointed divisional representative.

He was honorary secretary of ESSA from 2004-22 and has been its president twice: in 1998 and 2023. He has transformed the association during his time as secretary and is passionate about increasing the participation of schoolchildren in all the aquatic disciplines.

He has liaised with the national governing body [previously the ASA, now Swim England] to secure funding and has worked unstintingly to raise the profile of ESSA.

In 2006 John invited Prince William to become ESSA patron. He has organised events with the duke, including the Duke of Cambridge Water Polo Cup competition. He has also attended the duke's charity forum, where funds received from events have been crucial in providing additional financial support for ESSA activities.

“John has been a huge advocate of school swimming for years,” one source said. “Competitors and staff have enormous respect for him. He has shown great professionalism throughout his long involvement in aquatics, and thousands of schoolchildren – from grassroots up to elite level – have him to thank in no small part.”

