

**Sally Haynes: film interview at Stoke Mandeville Stadium with Jon Newman,
10 August, 2012**

Could you start by telling me the circumstances under which you first saw Stoke Mandeville Hospital?

I was born in Aylesbury and lived until I was 16 in Mandeville Road just a mile or so from the hospital, so I grew up being aware that it was becoming famous as a spinal unit at the top of the road. There was also a very well-known burns unit there that treated ex-servicemen so all my teenage years I was aware of injured and paraplegic ex-servicemen being taken down to the town all the time. I was also aware of the work they did at the spinal unit and this man called Dr Guttman because he was an Aylesbury figure and becoming well known in our area. When I was 16 we moved from Aylesbury and I did a lot of horse riding and competing in various things throughout my childhood and when I was just 18 I was riding in a point-to-point race near Northampton when the horse fell and it didn't really recover; it stumbled and turned over. I hadn't been removed from the saddle so the horse rolled over me and the back of the saddle went through my spine. I also had a few head injuries. I was taken to Northampton general hospital and operated on there, and in fact it was during the operation that they severed my spinal cord because it was only just being touched by the bone at the time. Anyway, they didn't really treat you in the right or accepted way as Guttman was seeing it.... They didn't treat me in the way that I would've been treated at Stoke Mandeville, in fact I lay on my back in a plaster cast with just one turn over each morning and I lay like that for 24 hours and I developed scoliosis in my spine at the time. Anyway my parents were fighting for me to come to Stoke Mandeville and Dr Guttman was egging them on and had a bed ready for me and everything. Eventually I got to Stoke and it was an awakening really because everybody was in chairs whereas in the other hospital I'd been the only one that was even confined to bed. Anyway so I got there and began to learn the terms, like one of the orderlies came and said "Oh you've got nasty spasms, you're spastic" and I said "I'm not spastic, I've just hurt my back", that sort of thing you have to come to terms with and learn about. And Dr Guttman appeared and I felt like my life in your hands really with him, and I obeyed him to be honest from then on for the first year, I had such faith in him because I had known of him before and none of it was a surprise. I had thought to myself "once I get to Stoke they'll put me right". So then my life carried on with lots of physiotherapy which included sport as the main therapy. I did archery, table tennis, swimming, everything. You had to do it really; it was just part of the treatment.

Was sport something that you were told to do, encouraged to do, suggested that you might do? How compulsory was it?

It was compulsory but I didn't mind that, I was straightaway finding it compensation for the life where I would've been competing on horses and in events so I enjoyed it. It was a challenge to have a go at sport. I was very determined, and as it turns out quite mistaken, but I thought "well I won't be able to ride again, I know they're not going to be able to get my legs working but they're so good there they'll get me so that I can go back to stable work and maybe just look after the horses, feed them and this, that and the other and be around them". So I was determined to get good in physiotherapy on my crutches, and I spent hours and hours climbing up the steps that were in the physiotherapy and thought that was a good thing to do... It turned out to be quite disappointing really but it was just one of the lessons of life that I found out quite quickly. We had horse running at

Birmingham racecourse very shortly after I was discharged from the hospital and I went to the races and thought "Oh I think I'll manage to get up to the top of that grandstand and I'll be able to watch properly, I'll be able to do my exercises to get up there that I did on the steps at Stoke". So I climbed all the way to the top on my crutches, it took me half an hour, and when I got there the horses were down at the starting line and I couldn't quite see them so I went to pick up my binoculars which were around my neck. I couldn't pick them up to use them because I couldn't let go of the crutches and stand up. And it was the nastiest experience of my life really, but it was an eye opener – don't go around thinking you're so clever because there will still be something not quite so good. And of course I never bothered to go up to the top of a grandstand again, I stayed at the bottom and used my glasses instead. That's just one of the things that I remember when I look back. I told Dr Guttman about it and he said "You did very well to get up to the top, it didn't matter if you didn't see anything" but it wasn't much help to me.

Did that make you more determined to focus on the sports that you were doing?

Well it was developing, I was just getting more interested in it and we had a physio at Stoke who was keen on table tennis and he invited me to join the hospital staff team that played in the local league with another friend of mine Philip Lewis, and Phil and I played in the Aylesbury league which I think we were probably the first people who had done it. I mean lots have done it much better than me since, but we set it off. [playing in able bodied league] able bodied teams against local factories and shops and things around Aylesbury.

What was the reaction from other players and other teams then from seeing this team with Philip and yourself in it?

I think to begin with they thought "It's not really fair for me to play someone in a wheelchair", but they found out that we put up a good show and the shots actually were a different angle from they were getting from the able bodied players, and the more they played us the more they got to know us, the more they appreciated it wasn't a walkover for them.

Was that a sport in which you were able to compete on equal terms?

I kept up table tennis all the time but I didn't ever become really, really good at it I was just fairly good but I was able to use it as my second sport throughout my sports career, whatever you call it.

And you changed your main sport didn't you, tell us about that.

Archery was my original sport and I did it in the Tokyo Olympics. I had a dreadful, dreadful day and decided, well I'm not going to ever do this again and I'm not going to touch that bow again and I slunk off into another sports hall where they were doing fencing and I just sat there having bit of sulk thinking "Well I've got to do something else, no good carrying on with the archery, I think I'll have a go at fencing" because it looked interesting.

So how did you introduce yourself to brand new sport as it were? It wasn't something that you'd previously done at Stoke Mandeville?

When I came home I learned that they did fencing at the Roman Catholic boy's school in Buckingham so I approached them to see if I could have lessons there and they agreed, so I went twice a week in the evenings to join the boys in their fencing lessons. Father

Roland was their teacher and he took me on as well, so apart from going to the lessons at the school at weekends he used to come to my house and coach me as well.

Going into a Catholic Boys school rather like going into those able bodied table tennis leagues, how were you seen by the boys when you went along?

No problem really, I didn't notice anything. I joined in with their drama groups and all other things with them once I got to know them, I went with them on other occasions and they had a very good rugby team and I used to go along and cheer them on. You know I just mixed in with them during that time.

So from training through the school were you then able to compete regionally and nationally and then internationally? How did that work?

We had a sports training club at Stoke and Father Roland agreed to come along to that as well to further my fencing education and also to teach anyone else in the club that would like to take up fencing and while he was there he had a friend called Norman and Norman came along as well. Norman used to take fencing lessons in High Wickham and Norman got involved and so became coach to the club and he went on to be a coach for the GB team in fencing, so it mushroomed really and my coaches became the coaches of the team.

When did you first fence in an Olympic Games?

Tokyo was 1964 when I decided to take it up and I went to the Games that were held in Israel in 1968. I think I was in the team of four that won and I was also won the individual novice, so within four years I got the winning gold.

How long did you continue?

Fencing became my thing from then on, but I with the table tennis as a second back up sport because in those days they liked you to have a second sport, it helped you be selected if you'd got two rather than one; but fencing became my main thing. I went to Germany, the next three Olympics I think

What was it about this particular sport that excited you?

I don't really know...It's not just a physical sport; the main thing is about outmanoeuvring people with the moves that you are going to make; and being in a wheel chair you actually use your finger play and wrist movements and arm defence faster than if you are an able-bodied fencer because they can jump away and move about and I did find when I joined able bodied fencing teams to train with I used to think, "Well they won't want to do it with me really; I'll be a bit of a drag." But I found out that they used to come to me and say "Can I have a fight with you Sally", and they would sit on a chair and have to do it from the sitting position because they wanted to do it, in fact they queued up to fight from that position because it speeded up their play. So I lost that feeling of being a nuisance to the rest of the club.