

Samuel James Hall 1951-2024

Sam (Jim to his family) was born in Enniskillen and brought up on a farm on the Fermanagh/Monaghan border. He commuted 30 odd miles daily to Portora Royal School, before studying medicine in Queens University. After junior hospital jobs, he started his surgical training, including a secondment to Seattle, ultimately being appointed to a consultant post in Craigavon as an Ear, Nose and Throat specialist. He retired from the NHS at aged 66, but continued to do medico-legal work until not long before his untimely and quite sudden death from cancer.

At school, and later Queens, Sam (now Sam to nearly everyone) began playing bridge, taking an avid interest in the game, and being sufficiently proficient that he was selected to play Junior Camrose (u26 Home International) bridge with James Blair several times from 1976 to 1980.

He played 10 Camrose matches between 1982 and 1987 with Hastings Campbell, the late Monty Roseberg, and the late Keith Singleton.

Around this time Sam met Liz Duncan, and they married in 1985, having a son and two daughters. They moved to the country near Moira, nearer to work, having bought a lovely Georgian farmhouse. Bridge largely took a back seat, though he continued to play in the Premier League and Congresses, with Ian Hamilton and others.

However, in the 2010s, with the family now a bit older, International bridge bit again, he setting a record for being selected 31 years after his last cap, partnering Ian Hamilton in the Camrose in 2018, and later teaming up with Hastings for further caps in 2020. There was also a Teltscher Trophy cap in 2014.

Much of Sam's success came early in his bridge career, prestigious wins including the Egan Trophy (all Ireland Teams) in 1984 and the CBAI Holmes Wilson teams in 1985.

Closer to home, in NIBU events, he had an enviable record from 1983 to shortly before his death, winning the Kelvin Cup 8 times, the Mackinnon Cup 9 times from the 80s till 2022-23. In Pairs events he won the NI Pairs twice with Ian Hamilton.

In 1987/88 Sam became one of the youngest ever Chairmen of the NIBU.

Sam's bridge career was capped when he won the IBU Senior Trials in 2024, representing Ireland in the Seniors Teams in the European Championships in Denmark in June. This was belated compensation for having to turn down a cap in 1985 which coincided with his secondment to Seattle.

At the table he could be a wild bidder, but played his cards as well as anyone. There were occasional sharp criticisms of partner, but they were always rapidly forgotten, and never any acrimony. He was a delight to play with.

Away from bridge Sam was great company, a generous host and loyal friend. All who knew him will miss him greatly as being one of the nicest people in bridge. I know I certainly will.

Ian Hamilton