

Vinnie Taylor, March 2026



"Freddie Trueman told me about this, too."

If you're interviewing someone in 2026, quotes like that don't come any better, pure gold dust. It was followed by, "He bowled me a bouncer and I hit it for four." The advice from Fred in the bar afterwards was to get more inside the line, so if you missed, the ball didn't hit you in the face. That was in pre-helmet days. Apparently, on his way back to his mark following Vinnie's boundary, Trueman uttered a series of unprintable comments, but he was very friendly after the match. (For less venerable vets in the club, a word of explanation: F S Trueman was an iconic Yorkshire and England fast bowler in the 1950s and 60s, the first bowler to take a then inconceivable 300 wickets in Test matches. Trueman was renowned for his fiery temperament.)

Vinnie Taylor is a Canadian - and Scottish - member of GB Vets whom many in the club may not know since he is based in Ottawa. The above quote shows that Vinnie's sports accomplishments extend beyond squash. In his time as a regular member of the Canadian cricket team, including captaining the side, Vinnie also faced the formidable fast bowling pair of Wes Hall and Charlie Griffith during a West Indies tour to Canada. Over a contemporary WhatsApp link, he nevertheless appears unmarked.

Vinnie was born in 1938 in Manchester and lived in Hale to the South West of the city throughout the war. In the summer of 1945, his family moved to North Berwick, then Gullane - his father was Scottish - before emigrating to Toronto in 1951. He learned to play golf at North Berwick and Gullane, and talks about using a telescope from the family home to watch Henry Cotton playing in the Open at nearby Muirfield. Vinnie "fell in love with squash" - then hardball - at the Toronto Cricket Skating and Curling Club while he was at uni studying engineering. For him squash was a winter game, which dovetailed well with cricket, but as a part timer he nevertheless reached the semifinals of the US National Doubles Championships, and represented Ontario on the team that in 1969 won the US National Team Championships.

In the 1980s, across the USA and Canada, 'softball' squash slowly overtook the traditional North American game of hardball. The latter largely existed in private clubs, but there was a burst of construction of public softball courts, in parallel with the explosion of the game

elsewhere in the world. Vinnie first encountered softball at an exhibition between Jonah Barrington and Ken Binns in the late '70s and quickly concluded that he would never be fit enough for it! By that time the hardball game was declining and Vinnie was playing mostly hardball doubles. But there were no hardball doubles courts in Ottawa when Vinnie moved there in 1985, so he was forced to take up softball. Under the guidance of Heather Wallace, he became relatively proficient in local events. His first international softball exposure was at the World Masters Games in Edmonton in 2005 which led him to enter more events. In 2008 at the World Masters in Christchurch, he lost to John Woodliffe in the semis of the o-70s. "Why haven't I seen you before?" John asked! By this time Vinnie had also met Lance Kinder, and he started making an impact in international 'softball' Masters squash. A longtime rival was the great US champion Michael Gough.

At the World Masters in Cologne in 2010 Vinnie was approached by an alert Alex Sinclair about whether he had any Scottish connections. 'Yes!' was the obvious answer. A long association ensued for Vinnie with Scottish squash: he played in the Home Internationals no fewer than nine times, before eventually Covid intervened. In Cologne Brian Phillips had also approached Vinnie, but it would have been a stretch for him to play for Wales, and anyway Brian was slightly late!

Playing for Scotland necessitated accruing enough points each season in regional Masters competition, so Vinnie established a pattern of winter life in the 2010s that involved frequent transatlantic trips to Scottish tournaments. This was made possible by an elderly cousin who, after she retired, moved to Canada and lived with Vinnie's parents. When she died, she left a significant portion of her estate to Vinnie and his brother Martin. This windfall helped fund Vinnie's travel, thus indirectly benefitting a succession of Scottish squash teams! Perhaps the apogee of the association was in 2018 in the o-75 Home Internationals in Galway, where Vinnie, as Canadian number one, played Nigel Belle of England (and of course also GB Vets) in the deciding rubber of the final match. Vinnie saved two match points and Nigel no fewer than four before Vinnie won 16-14 in the fifth game, with the championship going to Scotland.

Apart from the Home Internationals team win, Vinnie has a long list of Ontario, Canadian, US and Scottish titles, and one New Zealand/ Oceania championship! His great UK rivals were John Woodliffe, Lance Kinder, Brian Phillips and Pat Kirton. It was Lance and Vinnie who were primarily responsible for the Home Internationals being extended to the o-75 age group. In individual UK competition, as well as Scottish regional titles, Vinnie has twice won the British National o-80s title, in 2019 and 2020.

Vinnie will be particularly remembered in Canada, as well as for the tournaments he won, for everything he put back into the game. Notably he was heavily involved in junior Canadian squash. He established development programmes both for Ontario and Canada itself, and he promoted Masters squash at provincial and national levels. Without the benefit of national funding, he took junior Canadian teams to many tournaments in the USA. Several of his protégées achieved significant success. Vinnie doesn't have children himself, but this quote reflects perfectly the character that he is, "My children have always been everyone else's." The contributing side of Vinnie, as much as his playing side, resulted in his induction into the Ontario Squash Hall of Fame. In both 1970 and 2009 he was recognised with a Special Achievement Award by the Ontario government for his outstanding contributions to squash in the province.

However, as the first quote in this article attests, there's more to Vinnie than just squash. He claims never to have had an original thought in his life, but his engineering degree in Toronto

led to a job with Canadian railways, and to early years in London in the 1960s with Ferranti to learn about computers (and play cricket at a high level for Finchley CC). He found himself in due course at the Canadian National Defence Headquarters in Ottawa, from where he was seconded to Washington for three years. His role included membership of a number of NATO committees. He retired in 2003, but was asked back and spent a further nine years working part time.

Scottish squash then became one of the major factors in Vinnie's life, pretty much full time if you take into account the to-ing and fro-ing across the Atlantic. But you sense that, earlier on, cricket was more important to him. His first overseas tour was in England with the Canadian Cricket Colts in 1959, and he led a full Canadian team on a tour of England in 1974.

The Toronto Cricket Skating and Curling Club was Vinnie's cricketing home. It was there that from time to time he encountered top level touring teams, including the Yorkshire of Geoff Boycott and Fred Trueman, a Pakistan test side, and the West Indies of Wes Hall and Charlie Griffith. Vinnie was an opening batsman, a wicket keeper who was good enough to be persuaded back into the Canadian team several years after retirement, and a leg spinner when not keeping. He is a member of the MCC and of the Royal & Ancient – his retirement from cricket enabled him to resume his passion for golf. He would often play 36 holes on a Saturday or a Sunday, off a handicap that hovered between three and five, for more than twenty years.

Vinnie's squash is currently interrupted by a knee injury, but, legend as he is in the annals of the Masters game, he's hoping to be back. Sadly, he won't have his old friend Lance Kinder to jointly lobby for an over-85 category in the Home Internationals, and to extend international Masters competition in the direction of the o-100s. Vinnie would certainly be in for that, and would probably be seeded one in the first tournament.

To paraphrase Crocodile Dundee, 'Call yerself a veteran? Now *Vinnie Taylor's* what I'd call a veteran'!

Here are Vinnie's five questions.

- 1. Who was the best squash player you ever played?** I suppose it would have to have been in hardball doubles, when my partner and I played against Hashim and Mohibullah Khan in a tournament in Toronto. That was quite an experience and a lot of fun. In softball, it's hard to say as I didn't start playing it until I was almost fifty. But in my own category, I would have to say Michael Gough of the USA and Brian Phillips.
- 2. If you were the supreme being, which game would you dictate to be adopted universally, softball or hardball?** As supreme being, I would say the hardball squash of the 1960s, with the wooden racquets and the Craigen-Simplex ball of that era. After that, the ball and the racquet changed and the game lost its way. I like softball with PAR scoring, although I would prefer PAR15 over PAR11, at least in the Masters categories. PAR makes tournaments easier to schedule.
- 3. Squash, cricket or golf? If you could have played only one, what would it have been?** Good question! Although Martin Pearse has proved otherwise, the opportunities for playing cricket at an advanced age are minimal. Golf can be played at any age, as can squash if you can find the right opponent. If I was in the States, I would plead the Fifth Amendment.

4. **What are you most proud of in your sports career?** I suppose it would be in developing Canada's junior squash program from practically nothing in the 1960s into one that put Canada's juniors in the forefront of North American squash. This was in the days with no government funding. Many of the juniors from that program went on into careers in squash. I suppose I'm also proud to have been invited to join the MCC and also the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrew's. Both came as a huge surprise.

Fifth question, chosen by Vinnie:

5. **What am I most thankful for in my sporting life?** I consider that I was incredibly lucky to have an older brother who was mad on cricket from an early age, and two wonderful parents that encouraged and supported us both without pushing us in any particular direction. I'm thankful that my brother didn't murder me for failing to stump Geoff Boycott off his leg spin bowling. He never let me forget it until the day he died. I'm thankful for all the opportunities that came my way in all three sports and that I was able to take advantage of them. It's amusing that I have certificates from the government in three sports, but one year I failed Phys. Ed. at school.