Paul Bristow, formerly on Sporting Life greyhound desk: Very, very sad news. When I joined the Life dog desk in May ’71, Wally was the first to introduce himself and told me we were off to The Freemasons Arms for a liquid lunch. I knew straight away I’d found a great mate. We had some great times – lunchtime cards, golf, racing, countless drinks in the Stab, and a memorable trip to Corfu. Love to Molly and family. R.I.P old friend.

Geoff Duffield, ex-Sporting Life form room manager: God bless you Wally, and sympathies to Molly and family. He was a true and loyal Lifer and collectively we shared decades of fun together. This is a real heart breaker.

Caro Cluskey, formerly Sporting Life manager: I loved Wally. Always felt he should have been a rock star. Which, in a way, he was.

John Curle, formerly on Sporting Life greyhound desk: I’m really sad to hear this news about Wally. He was an amazingly charismatic bloke who stood out from the rest of us. He was also generous, funny, and a pretty good card player. He used to unfailingly call me “Curle” and at times took me under his wing. I needed a winter coat one year and he took me to a back street place somewhere in East London and helped me get a bargain sheepskin. He was a “face” and everyone knew him. Mainly though, he was unlucky enough to be my partner for the lunchtime sessions of 'Crunch' with The Admiral and Sid Hearn. We played in the Holborn canteen and I'm pretty sure there were numerous occasions when Wally would have cheerfully killed me. I was so nervous, sometimes I used to shake! The dog department was a crazy place to work back in the 1970s. Nuts! Wally was one of the reasons I loved working on the desk. He was a star. RIP Wally Watkins

Chris Gundry, formerly Sporting Life Man on the Spot: Wally was one of our team who played cards through the night before an early morning visit to London Zoo, and then back to The Sporting Life for work. The last time I saw Wally was at Mick “Molly” Malone's retirement dinner and, sadly, Wally didn't have a clue who I was. I was thankful because I owed him a tenner! I was seriously taken aback when I learned of his diabetes memory loss – he was a bloke who instinctively knew what cards I was holding in partner whist! What a shrewdie. Good night, Wally, and commiserations to your family.

Jeremy Chapman, ex-Sporting Life assistant editor: Sad news indeed. I remember Wally and Chris O’Keefe, also no longer with us, fighting out the final of the table tennis handicap tournament I organised for the whole office. Ossie (Ossie Fletcher, editor), came along to see the semis and final and presented the trophy. I had obviously given Alan too big a start as he beat me two sets to one in the semis. If memory serves me, I had to concede him 15 points a game, and it was a bit insulting as he was, as you say, quite sporty and athletic. Can’t remember who won the final but it might have been Chris. Pity we never ran it again as it was great fun. I loved the enthusiastic way he took my golf copy too. He always seemed interested and was one of the few who knew how to spell Seve Ballesteros! Considering his health problems he was a real warrior and his spirit was admirable. A really good colleague.

Mike Cattermole, former Sporting Life reporter: Wally was a good guy and always had a smile on his face. Being a fellow type 1 diabetic for the past 23 years (I was diagnosed two years after the Life closed), he and I ended up having something nasty in common. Because of that, I am extra sorry he has gone. Diabetes T1 is a horrible thing to deal with – 24/7, there is no let-up – so I admired Wal for the way he was and his attitude to life. My sympathies to his family.

Dot Garrett, widow of Danny, Sporting Life sports reporter: That’s sad news. I know Wally and Danny got on very well. I remember Danny buying a very plush velvet suite from Wally. Danny wasn’t into interior design so I guess it was for my benefit! (We had just met). m/f

Emma Hart, former secretary to the editor, Sporting Life : That is so very sad. What lovely tributes to a great bloke.

Sharon Powell: What a terrible shame. Wally was larger than life but so kind hearted. I passed many a copytaking shift with Wally and us two always had a giggle among the mayhem. I'm sorry to see him go but he's passed on to some fun times up there! There'll be loads of ex-Lifers ready to greet him. Fly high Wally. X

Terry McGovern: This is so sad. I first met Wally when we were both 15 and messengers on the Life. We were on Wandsworth Common for a Sporting Life five-a-side football game when he told me he had diabetes. I was shocked, but he just laughed, which was typical. He made sure it didn't stop him doing things he should have done – and a few he shouldn't! As other people have mentioned he was an extrovert, but beneath it all he was a very kind and generous man. My sympathies to Molly and his family.

Jimmy Murphy: So sad to hear about Wally. I always remember getting a lift to football in Wally's Sunbeam sports car. He wouldn't let me get in it until I took off my shoes! What a character.

Kevin Impey: One of the most colourful characters I had the pleasure in knowing during my 32 working on The Sporting Life, Wally always had a smile on his face. I recall a day back in 1975, when I had not been working on the greyhound desk for too long, when Wally was “coerced” by Admiral into driving a minibus full of Lifers to Monmore Green in Wolverhampton to watch the heats of the TV Trophy. Admiral had also coerced those on board to back a greyhound called Dunworkin, ante-post. Perhaps, predictably, it was eliminated but we recouped losses on Lizzies Girl (who went on to win the final) with Wally leading the deafening cheering that reverberated around the restaurant. I doubt that type 1 diabetics would have been permitted to drive minibuses back in those days, but the ever-versatile Wally was not deterred easily. Condolences to Molly and family. RIP, Wally

Paul Fry: Oh my goodness. Saddened to read this. Feels like an ever dwindling band of brothers and sisters. Love to Wally's family at this very difficult time.

Stevie Betts: So sorry to hear of Wally’s passing, please pass on our thoughts and condolences on to the family.

Alastair Down: As ever Hopper [Paul Duffett] keeps us all in touch with another "for whom the bell tolls" moment announcing the sad news that Wally has gone at that one.
Wally, cool as a film star but as accessible as your next-door neighbour, was yet another of the many Lifers who made this fat, fearful, posh tosser welcome to the paper in March 1981, back in the days when pterodactyls still circled the skies. Wally’s stocks in trade were kindness, a ready wit and the ability to make you feel all was right with the world. A super feller. Looking back down the decades, I never cease to be amazed at the magnificent motley crew I joined in New Fetter Lane – a tough school populated by hopeless softies who added a vast amount to the laughter of life. How privileged I feel to have been part of it all. And how grateful. It has been a pleasure to know you all. So Wally, "Reqiescat In Pace". And thank you.

Geoff Lester: I’m in Greece on hols in scorching temperatures, but I was so sad to hear about Wally. It might surprise some people, but in my teenage years I was a shy, reserve,d freckled ginger kid. On my first day as messenger boy in August 1964, I was chauffeured around by Molly Malone, who introduced me to the seasoned Lifers. On meeting the greyhound team I always remember a tanned Wally Watkins being one of the first to make me feel welcome. He was such a confident guy - could easily have been in a boy band - and never short of a joke or two. Even

when let loose on the outside staff I always stayed in touch with the boys from Long Acre and New Fetter Lane, and every time I walked into the office Wally was on his feet with that warm smile and another fun one-liner. Thoughts go out to his family - RIP old mate.

James Lambie: Inevitable, but very sad. The Sporting Life's stars are gradually being extinguished and Wally was one of them. I must have tested his cheerful, sunny disposition to the limit on many occasions as he took my stuttering, rambling copy, but not once did he ever complain (at least not to me). He was one of a wonderful band of copy-takers that kept me in my job and for that I am eternally indebted to him. My sympathies to his family.