



Roger Perham

Presented with Life Membership of Kent Netball in September 1999.

My introduction to netball was in 1972. A serving police officer, my first years in the Kent force had been rather nomadic, but, on moving to Ashford, there was every prospect that my family would become more settled as the police service was catching up with modern trends and allowing us to buy our own property. There was a thriving police wives club at Ashford, keen to improve their overall fitness. What did they all know something about – netball! Who was the driving force behind the new team – my wife. They had to have an umpire - who else but me!

At that time Ashford Netball League only played in the summer, on grass, in the local park. Every time there was rain the matches were called off and the lines washed away, but they liked it that way because when they slipped over, they did not hurt themselves. However, there was nothing in the league rules to say the matches had to be played on grass, so, with the help of the local council, a little-used car park was marked out and, to the consternation of opponents, our home matches were played on a hard surface. Whilst our team was going from strength to strength, I was gaining experience umpiring. No one in Ashford knew anything about umpiring awards, or seemed to care about advancement, so I turned to the Kent Association – my first contact with Joan Mills, the then Kent Umpiring Secretary.

In 1976 Joan passed me at Preliminary level (now the 'C' Award). My recollection of that event is non-existent, but Joan took great delight in describing the circumstances when we were both at a national event!

Keen to keep ahead of the other Ashford umpires, now seeing the opportunity to enhance their own status, I passed the Intermediate (now the 'B' Award) in 1978 and, after two unsuccessful attempts, the Panel Award in Stoke-on-Trent in 1982. We all take indoor netball for granted but, thirty years ago, it was very much the exception. Travelling up by train with fellow Kent umpire, Jan Bracey, I gave no thought to the possibility of the test being indoors and my only kit was normal full outdoor wear. I could live with a mild rebuke from June Jack after she told me I had passed!

Administration beckoned in 1978 as soon as I had passed the Intermediate Award. Joan Mills saw the opportunity to pass on the responsibility for umpiring in the county and so started my long and continuing involvement with the Kent Netball management committee. At that time Mary Thomas was the Kent county coach and Jill Pendrill was the active Panel umpire who always umpired the county first team. My first task was to persuade both Mary and Jill that, in the interests of umpire development, others should have the opportunity of umpiring at the higher level. There were five keen, recently qualified Intermediates all interested in advancement - myself, Karen Tappin, Cathy Hickey, Roger Bennett and Jan Bracey. My approaches were met with good grace and the opportunities came.

Becoming increasingly involved with Intermediate and then 'B' Award testing at Regional level, I was persuaded, on the retirement of Maureen Hyam, to take on the role of Regional umpiring secretary. My introduction to the national Umpiring Committee in 1994 soon followed. At that time Helen Watt was chairman. Subsequently Cheryl Danson took on the role and it was during her stewardship that we had to an increasing number of complaints about the standard of umpiring at county matches. This led to the introduction of neutral allocations to county matches divisions 1 and 2 in 1997 and I had the responsibility for the allocations – a role I still carry out. Over the years the requirements have changed – no longer servicing county and national club matches, the emphasis is now on the three divisions of the Premier League. Additionally, umpire performance is monitored on a continuing and regular basis to ensure that the correct standards are maintained at each level.

Now categorised as a senior citizen, I find my enthusiasm for netball umpiring undiminished. I retired from active umpiring when I took on the neutral allocation role. I gave up tutoring at all levels after many years, but remain active in all other areas - assessing, mentoring and match assessing.

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Netball has played a large part in my life for close on 50 years. It has been made possible by the unqualified support of my wife Mary and those that have worked with me within the sport. To be recognised by England Netball with the presentation of an Honorary Life Membership really was the 'icing on the cake' and so unexpected.



Roger as Kent Netball President, presenting to Anita Hollman, KN AGM 2017



Mentoring umpires at Kent Netball's Spotlight event 2008. With Joan Mills, Sally Baldock and Sara Mills.
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