

A Brief History Of The Acton Netball League

In the summer of 1962 a lifelong Acton resident, Alice Richardson, wrote to the Acton Gazette stating that while there was lots of sport catering for males in the Acton area, there was little or none for the fairer sex. Mrs Richardson (or Ricky as she was to become known for the rest of her life) believed that sport for everyone was the perfect way in which to keep fit and enjoy life to the full. In her letter to the newspaper she also announced that she intended to redress the balance of male orientated sport by starting an Acton Netball League and asked any teams that were interested to write to her.

Ricky formed a club, which she called Twyford (naming it after the road in which she lived) and was able to field two teams. Five other teams replied, and in the middle of September 1962 a 'getting to know you' rally was held at Bromyard Avenue Playing Fields. And so the Acton Netball League was formed.

At the beginning of October the Acton League commenced, the seven original teams being Adrema (Bradma), Beverley, CAV, Rootes, Twyford A and B and Walls. The league title was eventually won by Twyford A, who narrowly beat Beverley to the top spot. A very successful presentation dance was held at the end of the season at the Walls' Clubhouse. In fact the presentation dance continued until just a couple of seasons ago.

Season 1963-64 saw the league increase to eight teams with the inclusion of Chiswick Homefields, London Transport (District Line) and Walls B, Twyford only entering one squad. The title was again won by Twyford, who narrowly beat Beverley to the top spot on goal difference.

Scores from each week's games and league standings were published by the Acton Gazette and, because of the publicity, more teams applied to join and the following season, 64-65, saw the league increase to two divisions, the first consisting of eight clubs and the second, ten.

Season 67-68 saw the league increase in size yet again, this time to three divisions, Twyford winning Division 1, CAV division 2 and Walls the 3rd division. The following season again saw the league increase in size to four divisions, Twyford again finishing in top spot in the first division, Park - division 2, Acorn - division 3 and Sudbury Court B winning the 4th division.

And so the league continued to thrive. Not only did the players participate in the Acton League, but representative teams were taking part in the Middlesex Youth Netball League against other boroughs in the county and on various occasions that league was won by both senior and junior squads.

Start of the season and end of season rallies were organised every year and mixed rallies also became quite popular during the mid-seventies as did versatility rallies.

Activities were not only confined to netball. On many occasions, from the mid-sixties to the mid-seventies, Christmas parties were organised for the senior seasons of Acton in which players and league officials entertained the pensioners. It is true to say that there was a lot of talent in the league and some excellent revues and concerts were staged, much to the enjoyment of the senior citizens.

Quite a few players from the league played at County level for the various Middlesex squads and Heather Tyler (of Twyford) was captain for a couple of years of the very successful county junior county team in the mid-sixties.

The smooth running of the league over the last 42 years has largely been due to the excellent and dedicated committee that has organised events during that time. Continuity has been the key to success and it speaks volumes that since its formation, the league has only had three honorary secretaries: Alice Richardson (Ricky), Maureen Batterbee (who is still serving on the committee as Chairperson and Match Secretary) and the long time incumbent, Rita Hebbard.

How proud 'Ricky' (who sadly passed away in 1990) would be to know that her 'baby' is still in good health and going strong under the stewardship of all the dedicated players and ex-players that still run the league that had such small beginnings in September 1962. It is a fine tribute to her memory and long may it continue to thrive.