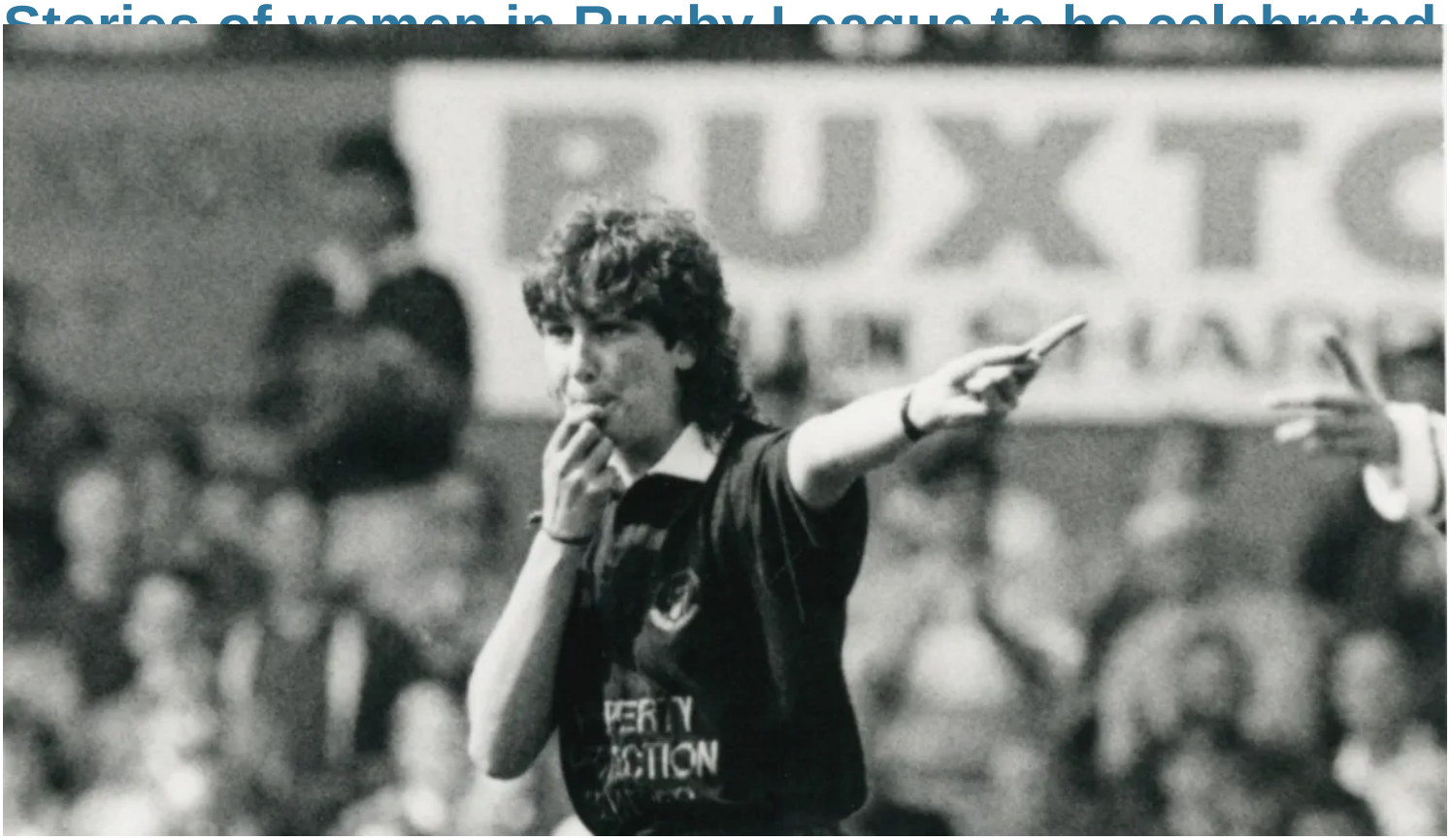
Stories of women in Rugby League to be celebrated



Julia Lee refereeing in 1986 Andrew Varley Agency

Inspired by the story of the first woman to referee men's Rugby League, a National Lottery-funded project has set out to explore the heritage of other women involved in the sport.

Crossing the Line: Women in Rugby League 1950 to the Present Day, is inspired by *Ref*, a play about Hull-born Julia Lee, who became the first woman to referee a men's rugby match of any code in 1991.

Julia is now director of Commonsense Initiative (CSI), which is behind the project, supported by £32,400 from the National Lottery. Crossing the Line will collect and preserve experiences, memories and artifacts of women who have been a part of Rugby League over the past 50 years in the Batley and Featherstone districts of West Yorkshire.

Sharing their stories

The participants will co-create an exhibition at the new National Rugby League Museum, opening in Bradford in 2020. A new website will also enable the stories to be shared with more people.

[quote=Julia Lee, former referee and director of CSI]"Thanks to the National Lottery, this is a great opportunity to deliver an arts and heritage project which will involve an underrepresented group in history."[/quote]

By telling their stories, CSI hopes other women will be inspired to share their own experiences and find their own place in what is still a male-dominated sport.

Collecting Memories

Julia said: “Thanks to the National Lottery, this is a great opportunity to deliver an arts and heritage project which will involve an underrepresented group in history.”

She added: “We are so excited to be able to work with Featherstone and Batley Rugby League clubs in this project and collect the many memories of women in Rugby League. We have little recorded about the history of women in the sport and [this] will begin to fill the void."

The project, run in partnership with Space2 Leeds, an arts and social change charity, and the University of Hull, is the first attempt to explore this area of heritage and to celebrate those who pioneered the female rugby presence in West Yorkshire.



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Helen Tyler, Heritage Project Officer at England Netball

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