Netball centre court as project scores Lottery

Kent v Essex County Final 1977 in Morden

Thanks to International Women's Day, women have been the focus of events and celebration across the globe. Now an innovative new project will reveal the history of the most played female team sport in the country and the only one which receives weekly TV coverage (on Sky Sports).

England Netball, also known as the All England Netball Association, will team up with local schools and volunteers of all ages in Hitchin, Hertfordshire – just in time to celebrate its 90th anniversary. Project participants will help gather memories of the sport; delve into archives spanning nine decades and recreate historic games to bring the story of netball to life.

Helen Grant, Minister for Sport, said: "I can't think of a better way to mark 90 years of netball than through this wonderful project which celebrates the sport's UK roots. I'm sure this initiative will ensure netball continues to grow in popularity, particularly ahead of the Netball World Cup in Liverpool, 2019."

Born out of women's basketball in the 19th century, netball is now played by 22 million people worldwide – mostly women.

Thanks to its popularity, many people have first-hand experiences of the sport – from playing professionally to learning the basics at school. These memories will be captured to add a truly personal perspective to England Netball's archives.

Coaching sessions at schools aim to promote netball as a way to get active and to inspire the next generation of players. They will also demonstrate how the rules and style of the game have changed over the decades.

The project will culminate in recreations of historical matches which will involve 1,000 players, umpires and spectators. School children will also have the opportunity to add an authentic look to the matches by reconstructing netball kits from past eras.

A mobile exhibition will share the story with a wider audience and online resources and a project blog will enable netball fans worldwide to get involved and celebrate the history of the sport. The project will also strengthen and add to Netball England's archives as well as establish an effective management system to ensure the stories it holds last for generations to come.

Robyn Llewellyn, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund East of England, said: "A great many of us have our own personal experiences of netball but do we know how it developed or who the pioneers of the sport were? We're delighted to support England Netball as they preserve and boost the archives which hold the answers to these questions and bring the story of netball to life, especially for the next generation of players."

The grant award comes just a month after the exciting news that the Netball World Cup is coming back to home soil in 2019 for just the third time since the inaugural tournament took place in Eastbourne in 1963.

Joanna Adams, CEO of England Netball, said: "We are absolutely delighted to have received this substantial investment from the Heritage Lottery Fund to preserve and work on collating some of the most cherished memories from our wonderful history.

"We move into our 90 year anniversary as a National Governing Body in 2016 and while we continue to build for the future, remembering our past is just as important to us. This funding will go a long way to securing this and will also provide a lasting legacy which we will proud to look back on in the years to come."

As well as funding from the HLF, the project is supported by East Anglia Film Archives, British Schools Museum and the Hitchin Historical Society.

Further information

For further information, interviews and images contact Rebecca Lamm, Heritage Lottery Fund press office, on 020 7591 6245 or Rebecca.Lamm@hlf.org.uk.