

Blog Posts for Our Netball History

Netball in the Civil Service and on Tour

As the popularity of netball continued to grow, workplace teams began to form, for example in the Civil Service. A fantastic example of just how popular it became can be seen in 1926 when netball teams from the Civil Service were included in a series of sporting events at the new Civil Service sporting ground in Chiswick. The event was attended by King George V and the Duke of York, who watched the various matches and shook hands with all the teams.



A Civil Service Team, *Netball*, October 1934

An interesting article published 1935 gives us a look at netball in the Civil Service. It is a quick review of the Representative Team trials in 1935. It states that the trials were open to everyone, however there is very little evidence to show men playing the sport during this time period. Even today netball in schools and in the workplace remains a predominantly female territory.

In 1935, the Civil Service Representative team from London travelled to Manchester for a friendly matches against Lancashire County, Manchester University and Liverpool University. The matches proved to be a great success and, as recalled by one the team members, that interest had been shown in future matches and tours. It also had the added impact of generating enthusiasm for more Civil Service netball teams to be set up. The team then travelled to Liverpool for another game before returning to London. Netball in the Civil Service is still extremely popular, with teams all over England.

From Feminine Ideals to 'Netballitis'

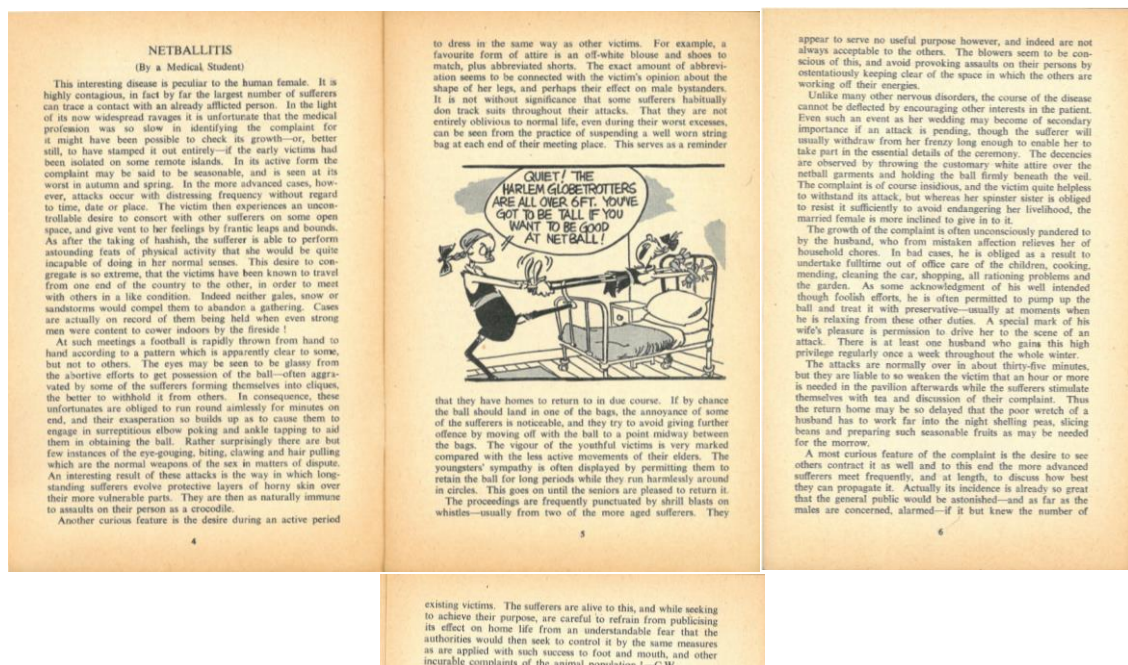
In the early twentieth century, due to concerns about the fitness of the nation, netball was promoted as a way for women to improve their fitness and wellbeing. Particularly from a health perspective, women were seen as 'delicate'. There was a common misconception among medical professionals that excessive exercise would be detrimental to a girl's reproductive health. There was also the view that sports would 'decrease femininity'. This is especially evident when looking at the types of sports available to women and girls.

Whilst netball and hockey were deemed suitable for women to play, sports such as football were viewed as being too active for women to participate in. The popularity of netball can partially be attributed to the fact that it was solely aimed at women, a rarity in the early twentieth century.

The dramatic increase in the popularity of netball before, during, and after Second World War is therefore very telling of the social changes taking place and society's views of women were changing.

An extract from the *British Medical Journal*, written in 1922, gives us an interesting insight into how netball was viewed by both health professionals and school teachers. There was general approval of netball being played in schools as it was seen to be beneficial to the 'character of girls'.

As the first half of twentieth century progressed so did women's participation in sports as there was less opposition to women playing sports. There was even a humorous article published in 1952 in *Netball* magazine, written by a medical student, titled 'Netballitis'. The article pokes fun at the fact that netball was more important than a player's wedding and challenges the stereotypical traditional role of women, showing how much attitudes had changed since the start of the century.



Space to Play (Part 1)

One of the reasons why netball was able to become so popular and widespread was due to the fact that it could be played in various environments, both indoors and outdoors and, in some cases, even on the roof!



Barrett Street School, 1928
(London College of Fashion,
College Archive)

There was also the added advantage that netball did not require a huge amount of space to be played. This meant netball was ideal for

schools, as many, particularly those in urban areas, did not have a great deal of facilities to play sports. However there was growing concern that many schools lacked the adequate space and equipment to play sports. By the 1930s the attitude was that suitable space to play was a 'very necessary part of a schools need these days when girls are keen on all kinds of sports such as netball'.

The calls for better sports facilities coincided with the increasing concern over the general health of the nation during the first half of the twentieth century. There was even a pamphlet handed out on 'School Playing Fields' by the Board of Education. The pamphlet mentions that the board was offering grants to pay for 50% of the costs necessary to increase the size of school playing fields. In response to the lack of space to play the National Playing Fields Schools Association was set up. New playing fields allowed better opportunities for girls, and inter-school matches to take place.

Space to Play Part 2

Netball's increasing popularity is in no small part due to the versatility of the sport in terms of what is needed to play. The typical size of a netball court is 30.5m by 15.25m, a fraction of a hockey pitch, which would usually be 91.4m by 55m. The dimensions of the court can easily be changed to suit the space available. Netball can also be played indoors. This is great for players as this means the sport can be played all year round, including those chilly winter months and those rainy summer days. In September 1924, *The Daily Mail* published an article on the sports 'inexpensive enjoyment', and in particular referred to the benefit of how in bad weather netball could be played in a gymnasium or large sports hall, with teams being reduced to five if necessary.

The limited space required to play netball is another reason as to why the sport became so popular within schools. A letter published in *The Times* in 1925 pleaded for more playing fields in poorer parts of the country, pointing out that even if some grounds were too small to be converted into football or cricket fields, they could certainly be turned into netball courts. The fact that netball can be adapted to suit the space and facilities available is undoubtedly one of the defining factors as to why netball was such a popular sport back then, and still is today.

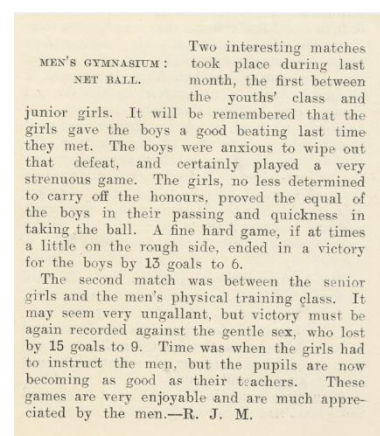
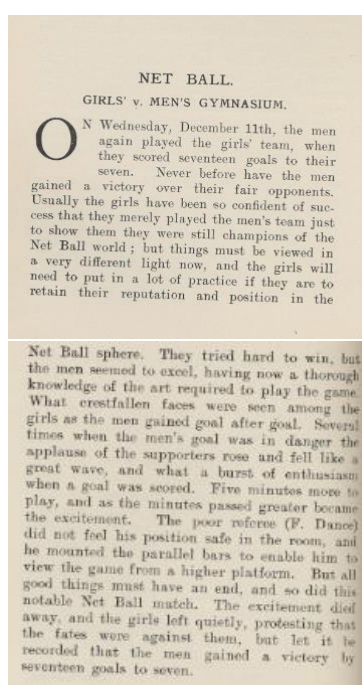
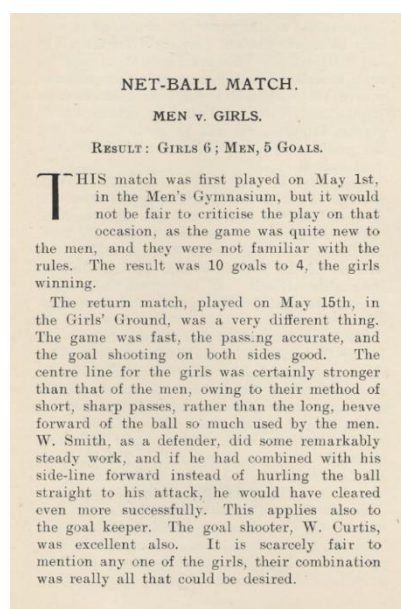
Men and Netball

It may be surprising to some that netball is also played by men. Men vs. Women games are the most common way in which men have played the sport. Several of these games have taken place at Cadbury's Bournville and even occasionally in the Civil Service. The first records of these matchups go all the way back to 1st May 1907, where men, albeit new to the sport, were beaten comprehensively by the women with a score line of 10 goals to 6. However men began to get to grips with netball, and just a few days later on 15th May, a much improved performance by the men saw them lose out narrowly to the women by 6 goals to 5, in a fast paced game with more accurate passing from the men's side.

Men continued to show great progress, and just a year later in 1908 they beat the women by 17-7, in front of an excitable crowd. The action on court became so intense that the referee felt it necessary to climb onto some gym equipment in order to find some safety and gain a better view of the game.

By the year 1910 it was clear that gone were the days when women had to instruct the men, and it could even be said that the men were becoming just as good as their female counterparts. This was displayed when the men recorded a double victory over the women.

Both matches were said to have been interesting, with good quality technique being displayed by both sides. In the first game, the men walked out 13-6 winners and 15-9 victors in the second.



Bournville Works Magazine, 1907, 1908, 1910

(Cadbury Archive, Mondelēz International)

The Army and Netball

Netball has a long history in the Armed Forces as it was one of the few sports that was approved for women to play in the first half of the twentieth century. The Army used sports to foster competitiveness and boost morale.

The low impact nature of the sport made it suitable for use in the rehabilitation of injured soldiers. In 1949 six wheelchair netball teams competed for the first time at the famous Stoke Mandeville Games, forerunner of the Paralympics. Wheelchair Basketball later replaced it, but this is an important moment in netball's history. It marks the beginning of the sport becoming accessible to all abilities.

Netball's role in rehabilitation goes beyond physiotherapy. It was believed to be beneficial to those suffering from temporary Air Shock during the Second World War. In 1940, Lord

Ebbisham, chairman of the Comforts Collections Committee of The Red Cross and St John War Organisation, made a national appeal for sporting equipment. This included netballs and posts, to be used by airmen in British hospitals as part of their treatment.

Army netball matches have been attended by some famous figures. In 1955 and again in 1964, Mary, Princess Royal was present at the Women's Inter-Unit Netball final at St James's Palace, in Aldershot.

The Army Netball Association was established in 1918. The A.N.A. have several different squads, including an Army Masters squad for veterans. The teams train regularly at their base in Aldershot and sometimes go on international tours. To find out more about upcoming events, visit <http://www.armynetball.org/>

Cadbury's, Bournville and Netball

With thanks to Cadbury Archive, Mondelez International for their invaluable help

Netball has been played within the workplace since the early twentieth century. At this time, one of the most well-known companies for promoting workers' welfare through physical activity was Cadbury's. The concern for the welfare of employees can be attributed, in part, to the Quaker origins of Cadbury's.

Although Cadbury's was founded in the early 1800s, it wasn't until 1879 that the village of Bournville began to be constructed. Bournville was a concept created by George Cadbury, who wanted to unite the factory workers together by creating housing around the workplace for workers to live in. Bournville originally consisted of just 16 houses that were for the foreman and senior employees of Cadbury's to take up residence. Over time the village expanded greatly, with there being 149 houses in total by 1895. A range of facilities were available to the workers who lived in Bournville, including playing areas for children and various sporting spaces and equipment. Football and cricket were originally encouraged for men whereas netball was encouraged for women. Netball was promoted as it was seen as a more 'acceptable' sport for women to play due to its minimal aggression, movement and contact levels.

Over time sports became more popular within Cadbury's amongst a growing number of workers. In 1899, the two owners of the company implemented organised athletics for the workers, in hope of providing a way for employees to be able to relax outside of work. The Bournville Girls' Athletics Club (B.G.A.C) was formed in 1899 and club members took part in inter-departmental competitions, which sometimes included male employees too.

The First Girls Netball Team (pictured right) was created in 1916. The girls played against local teams along with others from around the country, such as a team from the London Business Houses in 1928.

The Bournville Netball team has been one of the most successful and well-known workplace teams in the twentieth century. Workers' involvement in sport has been evident within the company since the latter half of the nineteenth century and netball was a huge part of it, especially for women. The encouragement of sports from the owners of Cadbury fuelled the Netball fire and contributed to the rise in its popularity during the early 1900s.



'The First Girls Netball Team', year unknown

(Cadbury Archive, Mondelez International)

One of the biggest netball events to happen at Bournville, was the 21st anniversary celebration of All England Netball in 1947. Netball matches took place as well as other celebratory events, including some women dressing in old-style netball kit of long skirts and blouses.

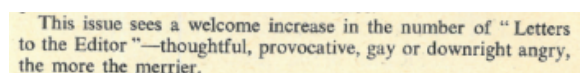
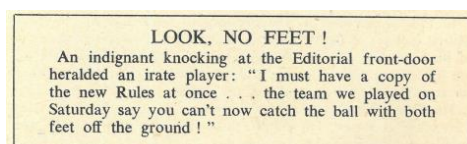
Netball

Netball magazine has been in publication since 1933. Initially the magazine was comprised of match reports, upcoming fixtures, and editorials. The editorials ranged widely in their subject matter from technique and interpreting the rules to what players should wear and more light hearted observations about netball and its players. The magazine's first editor and publisher, Marjorie Pollard, was also the editor of the equivalent hockey magazine, showing just how small the world of women's sport publications in the 1930s truly was.

As the magazine grew in popularity the number of adverts featured also increased. Advertisements for purveyors of sporting goods and sportswear were the most common. Cadbury's, who had a successful and well known netball team based at its Bournville factory, also advertised their drink Bourn-Vita in *Netball's* pages. Printing adverts helped to finance the magazine in addition to reader subscriptions. In early editions of the magazine in particular, readers are reminded to pay their subscriptions and encourage friends to do the same in order to keep the magazine in production.



By the 1950s, *Netball* had expanded from a short 12 page booklet to an established magazine of around 40 pages. It regularly featured poems and short stories submitted by readers of all ages. Letters to the editor also gave readers the chance to share training tips and to receive advice on the complex rules.



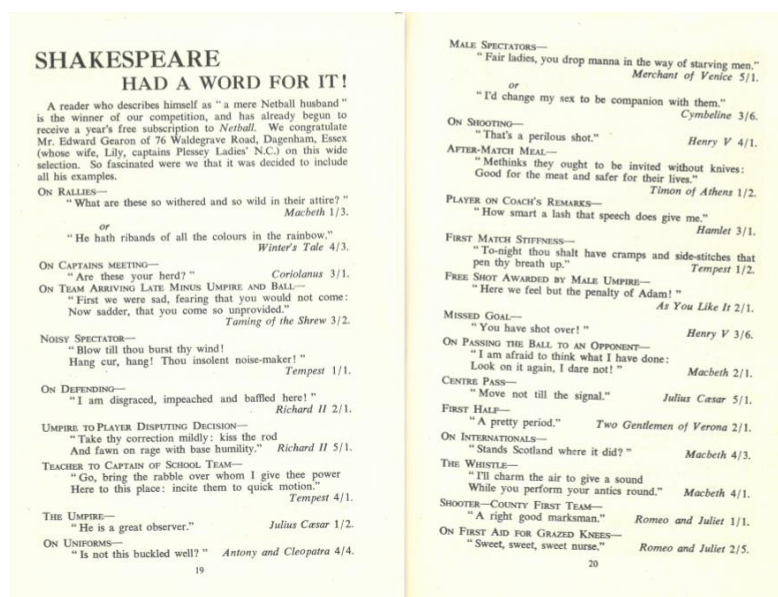
Netball is an important part of the history of netball, not only because it documents it, but because it gave women the chance to have their work published. Contributions to the magazine often came from members of the public rather than professional sports writers making *Netball* a magazine for the players, by the players.

Netball continues to be published quarterly.

The following gallery is a selection of pieces published in *Netball* between 1934 and 1956.

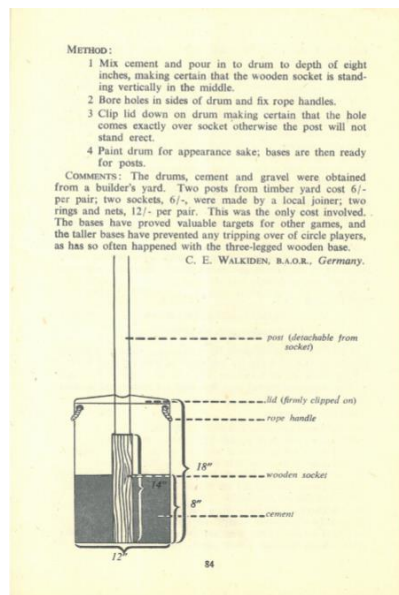
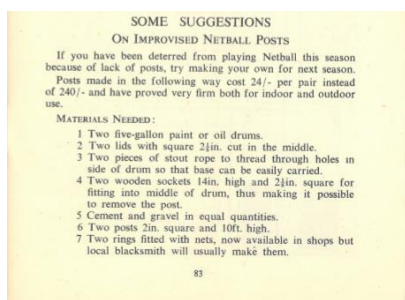
Shakespeare- netball husband:

This is the winning entry for a Shakespeare inspired competition run by *Netball* in the 1950s. The winner, 'a mere netball husband', used situations that arose at his wife's netball matches for inspiration. His efforts won him a free subscription to the *Netball* magazine for an entire year!



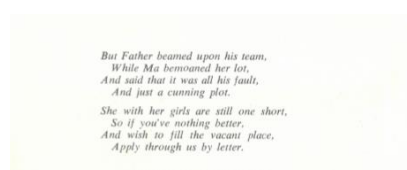
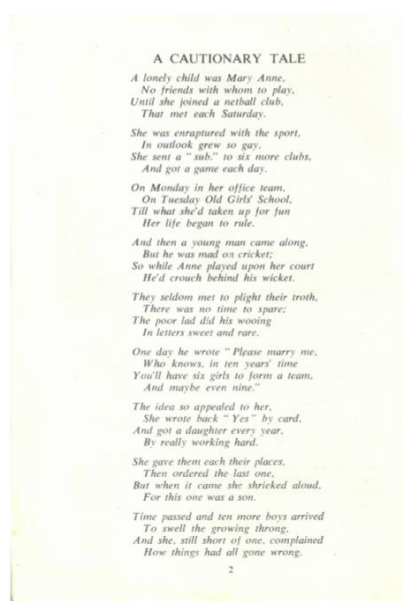
Netball post

One issue of *Netball* included a helpful tutorial on how to assemble the base of a netball post in case of shortages. Using materials that can be easily sourced and are inexpensive Walkiden, from Germany, stated that the new bases could prevent accidents due to their increased stability and proved useful during other games.



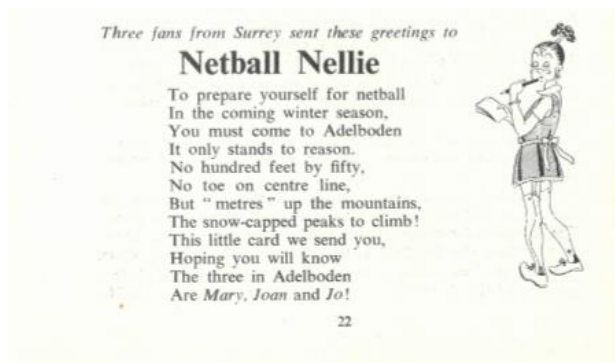
A Cautionary Tale

Amusing, and some presumably fictitious, poems were published in some issues of *Netball*. 'A Cautionary Tale' describes how one woman married in hopes of producing enough children to make up a full nine-member netball team!



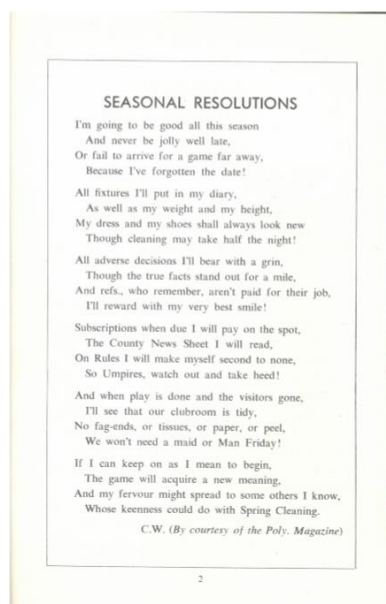
'Netball Nellie' - Winter Greeting

In the 1950s *Netball* regularly featured 'Netball Nellie' as a quirky section of the magazine to showcase various pieces of creative writing sent in by readers. This particular piece was written by fans from Surrey, explaining how in order to prepare for the coldness of winter, players should go to Switzerland beforehand!



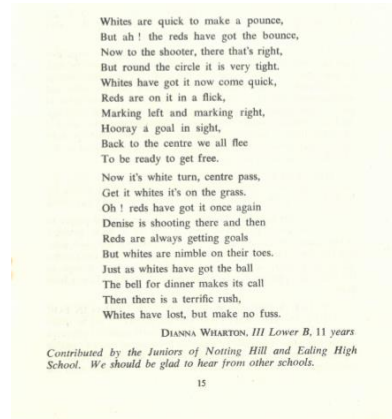
Seasonal Resolutions

This featured poem explains how one girl vows to do everything correctly for the up-and-coming netball season. Tasks includes: maintaining a clean kit, taking note of fixtures and even paying subscriptions on time! Hopefully by maintaining these 'resolutions' it would provide a season of quality.



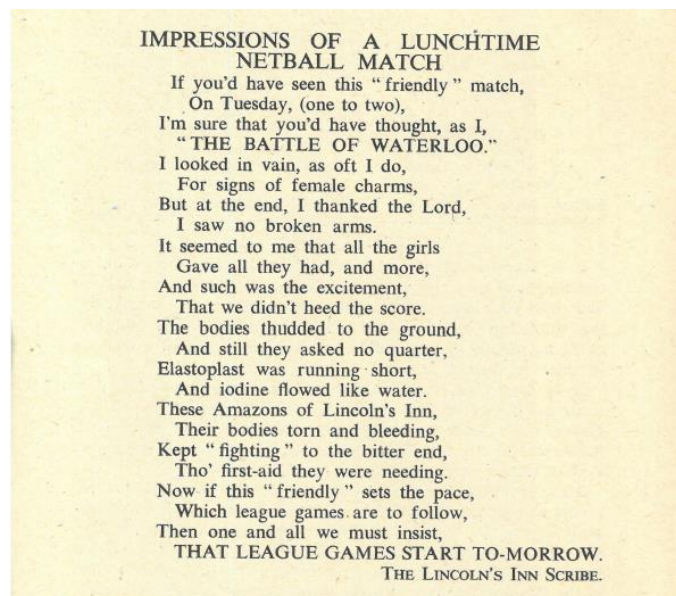
Untitled poem- School's Corner

'School's Corner' was a recurring segment of *Netball* that allowed school students to have their materials published. This particular issue included a poem by Dianna Wharton, aged 11, of Ealing High School, describing a nail-biting lunchtime netball match at school.



Once more into the fray!

'Impressions of a Lunchtime Netball Match' tells of a particularly boisterous and fierce netball match. The writer compares the match to the Battle of Waterloo despite it only being a 'friendly'!



More from 'Netball Nellie' – Concentration

Netball Nellie

ADVISES PLAYERS

TO CONCENTRATE



*Upon a court once crept a rat
Just as the game began,
And up a post into the net
This loathsome creature ran.*

*The girls all shrieked and shrank away;
The "ref." just gave a frown
And shook the post from side to side
To make him tumble down.*

*He peered at them from where he perched
Quite calm amid the din,
As if to say: "Get on with it
And may the best team win."*

*And so with many a doubtful look
The girls began to play,
But shots were missed and passes muffed
And "Rules" went all astray.*

*Each time the ball was at his end
The rat grinned like a cat,
For never could the shooters put
It near to where he sat.*

*They tried so hard time after time
But every shot went wide;
The rat sat there without a care
Or worry for his hide.*

*Then just before half-time was blown
He yawned and slipped away,
To tell his neighbours and his friends
Of what he'd seen that day.*

*He said he couldn't understand
What humans saw in this;
They seemed to want the ball in net,
But all they did was miss.*

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*"What's more," he said, "it's plain to me
That had they aimed it true,
It never would have stayed in there
But quickly fallen through."
So, girls, the moral is quite clear—
Let nothing put you off;
Though fans may cheer and urge you on
And critics stand and scoff. C.W.*

In this contribution to 'Netball Nellie', the story of a rat disrupting a match is used to teach a valuable lesson to players. As the poem concludes, 'the moral is quite clear – let nothing put you off'.

Divine Intervention

This submission has caught the attention of a *Netball* subscriber who felt the need to share it with their fellow netball enthusiasts. The prayer, taken from 'a book of Uncommon Prayers', asks for players to have a sense of humour with which they are able to meet both victory and defeat.

AN ATHLETE'S PRAYER

*Help me to play the game, dear Lord,
With all my might and main;
Grant me the courage born of right,
A heart to stand the strain.*

*Send me a sense of humour, Lord,
To laugh when victory's mine—
To laugh, if I should meet defeat,
Without a fret or whine.*

*Give me the grace to follow rules,
Confess when I am wrong,
When silence or the other thing
Wins plaudits from the throng.*

*When foes are tough and fighting fierce
And I am getting weak,
Dear God, don't ever let me show
A broad, bright yellow streak.*

*And teach me, Lord, life's game to play
Just one day at a time—
With Thee as coach and trainer, Lord,
Real victory must be mine.*

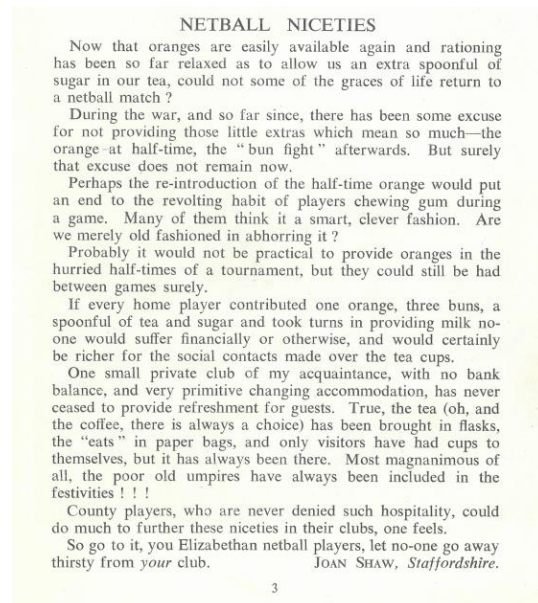
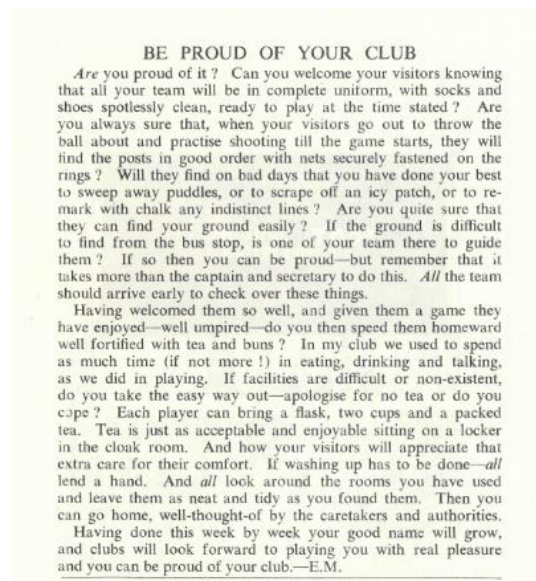
THE REV. FREDERICK D. TYNER,
Culled from a book of Uncommon Prayers.
(Sent by a Guernsey subscriber)

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Playing Host

These two submissions highlight a common theme in earlier editions of *Netball*. The importance of being a good host to opposing teams was, to some, as important as the quality of their playing. The reputation of a team came not only from their ability on the court, but also from their provision of refreshment and facilities to visitors.

‘Netball Niceties’ also details some of the effects that the Second World War and rationing in particular had on a team’s ability to provide sustenance to visiting teams.



About the Authors

Ellie, Sarah, Connor and David are second year History, Museums and Heritage/History students at the University of Central Lancashire and have produced these articles as part of their Community History Project module.