



Surrey Netball – a potted history

Produced for the programme for the SCNA 90th Anniversary Celebration Dinner at Banstead Downs Golf Club, Cheam, Sutton, 11 March 2023

The inaugural meeting of Surrey County Netball Association was held on 31st March 1930 in Croydon with forty attendees. Netball clearly popular as was a league structure already in place with three leagues represented at inaugural meeting: Croydon & District, London Old Girls and Woking. Affiliation fees set at ten shillings per club with six shillings going to the Territory (subsequently SE Counties) and four shillings to governing body (All England Women's Netball & Basketball Association).

In 1931 total number of playing members was over four hundred in fifty clubs. County trials were held and newly formed Surrey team won SE Counties Tournament. First Surrey Schools Rally held in 1934. In 1936 new costume was suggested by County Coach: green tunic & long sleeved blouse, white socks and black gym shoes. In 1937 Surrey won SE Counties Tournament and qualified to play at the Festival of Youth at Wembley; also invited to play in Ireland.

In 1943 a General Meeting was called to restart the activities of the Association, which had ceased during the early years of WW2 and 1944 saw the formation of the Surrey League. From that time on Surrey County began to achieve – in 1946 they won the All England Netball Tournament. A letter was sent to the Board of Trade in 1949 asking for clothing coupons for uniform. 1949 saw start of Surrey supremacy as All England Netball Champions – a title not relinquished until 1965.

1951 Metropolitan and Kingston Leagues mentioned in SC AGM minutes; first season for Kingston. In 1954 AE toured South Africa and four Surrey players were selected for touring team. In 1955 Australia toured Great Britain and was beaten by Surrey!

In the sixties Indoor Evenings became very popular and raised funds for county teams travelling to the AE Inter-County Tournaments.

1970s Queen's Jubilee Youth Games held at Crystal Palace Netball Competition won by Croydon.; many in the team played for Surrey U21 team. All leagues became autonomous; until that date the SC Chairman had presided over all league AGMs.

1980 Surrey Seniors became AE Inter-County Champions in Jersey. The following year in Battersea Park Surrey U21s took the AE U21 Inter-County title.

The National League competition was formed and this saw Surrey teams travelling all over the country to play matches against other counties. By this time we were running three senior teams, two U21 teams and U18 and U16 teams.

2001 Saw the introduction of Junior Development Workshops Now these are called Satellite Academies, leading to County Academies, with a pathway to England squads. England Netball continue to review the player pathway and recently reduced the age groups within the county programme down to U13 and U15. This has resulted in a shift of emphasis and now more activity is taking place with players at primary school, with clubs and our new junior league extending down to U11 and younger. In 2001 the county bought in the services of a Development Officer, but since then England Netball have created a new regionalised structure of NDOs since then. We have been lucky to have a full time Surrey NDO for many years. The NDO supports clubs and introduces England Netball programmes. Walking netball and Back to Netball are now well established across Surrey, and we hope that the new Bee Netball for really young children will be taken up by schools and clubs in the next few years.

In 2006 England Netball introduced a new Competitive Structure, which was disappointing to many netballers, who had taken great pride in playing/umpiring for their county. The new EN structure involved a Superleague, a Premier League and a Regional League. SCNA formed a new County League and top clubs from the leagues were invited to participate. This league continues to offer a highly competitive standard of netball, with clubs gaining promotion to the Regional league – our clubs this season are Roundwood, Tiffin and Capital Nuns. We are also proud to have The Downs NC maintaining their position in the Premier League.

At the time of our 80th anniversary dinner in 2012 there were 6 senior leagues, 3 junior leagues with a membership total as at 2012 of 3537; about one third of these U18. As we celebrate our 90th anniversary, our membership in 2023 has grown significantly- we are approaching 7500 members, 75% of whom are U18. The recent growth particularly showcases our successful performance academy programme and the new junior county-wide league established in September 2021. Our U14 and U11 membership is the highest in the region by quite some margin. Of particular note is how hard schools, academies, clubs and leagues worked to retain members during the Covid-19 pandemic, which affected the season 2019/20 in particular, but also 2020/21 season. Due to these efforts, netball activity was able to take place as soon as government and England Netball guidance allowed. We will soon forget some of the more detailed requirements – remember balls and posts had to be sanitised after every quarter, and players were not allowed to swap bibs? Even new regimes for getting onto the court with one way systems in place. Our leagues continue to thrive, and the Croydon League has become a central venue, working with Shirley High School to achieve grant funding for 6 new outdoor courts, newly with floodlighting. Schools across the county are gradually improving their facilities which clubs are welcoming, but there is always demand for more.

Surrey netballers have continued to achieve success during the past decade, with clubs and individual players gaining recognition. Historically, Surrey has such talented players and the more recent history is no different. England players Geva Mentor and Eboni Usoro Brown began their careers in the county, and others have played for Surrey Storm including Katy Holland, Hannah Reid, Alima Priest and Rhea Dixon. Naomi and Leyla Allen began

their journey to Storm from the Croydon League. Currently, there are two Vitality Superleague franchises within our region, Storm and London Pulse and our young players are continuing to represent both.

Another part of the netball family, schools in the county have always achieved the highest success, and the last 10 years have been no exception. As well as St Catherines, Guildford High and Putney High have been age group winners at the National Schools tournament, such a pinnacle of achievement for these players.

We are proud that so many people are progressing their umpire and coaching education, many helped by the grant award scheme the county has been offering during the last 10 years. Additionally, clubs and individual players have been supported. So far we have awarded £53,000 in grants, funded by our members and given to our members. This is a great scheme and we encourage people to apply.

As well as our grant scheme, during the past decade, the county has been recognising success and volunteer achievement across all aspects of our netball family through our Surrey Lions Awards scheme. The ceremony takes place at our annual AGM in June and we then take forward nominations to the Regional Awards, which are the step up to the National Golden Globes awards, now called the One Awards. We welcome nominations from individuals, clubs, leagues and schools.

Surrey continues to make important contributions to the governance of our sport, and we are proud that our President Maureen Clark has been Chair of the London and South East Region, succeeded by Alison Bennett. They represent our members at national level. Maureen has also been awarded England Netball Life Membership in recognition of her service. In addition, many Surrey members have received England Netball Long Service awards. The league committees form the backbone of netball in the county, and their hard work and dedication is to be admired.

The programme for our 80th anniversary dinner concluded by saying “Netball is being played all over Surrey and its popularity grows as the years go on. We have had great success in the past and from the figures quoted above – our future is bright”. These sentiments remain true today.

Thank you to Maureen Clark for her research and drafting this text