






10 

YEAR
ANNIVERSARY
Goalball UK
Transforming More Lives

Transforming More Lives


A celebration of Goalball UK and the impact over the first 10 years

-  “Only 11% of people with a visual impairment (VI) participate in at least 30 minutes of physical activity per week, compared with 39% of the general UK population. This is a situation that helps to perpetuate issues around physical and mental health, as well as social isolation.”
-  “For the last decade, the Goalball UK team have been working at the heart of the VI community, the largest cohort within the disability spectrum, to provide transformational opportunities to experience the challenge and joy of team-based sport. Whilst we strive to succeed as a nation on the world stage, for many of our players their ‘medals’ are won each day as they are increasingly able to live independent and confident lives.”
-  “Your support is crucial to bringing sport’s best kept secret to many of the underserved population of 2 million people in the UK who have a visual impairment. This report details just how much of an impact your generosity can have, which gives members of the blind and partially sighted community the opportunity to harness the power of this team sport.”



Goalball UK Introduction

by John Grosvenor, Chairperson of Goalball UK

-  “During the years that I have been involved with Goalball UK, I have heard countless inspirational stories from players, coaches, families and volunteers about the impact that the sport has had on them. This ranges from having the opportunity to connect with their peers, to having an outlet to keep active, those inside this sport know what a profound influence that goalball can have.”
-  “We have always struggled to quantify this in a way that demonstrates immediately the value of the sport to those that might not be familiar. That is why we teamed up with York St John University to conduct a piece of research, something that we believe to be the first of its kind in the world, to explore this in more detail.”
-  “As we have just celebrated our 10-year anniversary, we thought it was the perfect time to produce a piece of work that encompasses the experiences and feedback from those at the heart of the sport. We believe this research paints a vivid picture of just what value the sport offers, not only to its players, but to the wider blind and partially sighted community.”
-  “We want to thank those that participated and everyone from York St John University that was involved with this project to produce an insight into goalball like no other.”

The Goalball Family

An exploration of the social value of goalball amongst players and communities in the UK

Goalball UK commissioned research in partnership with York St John University to explore the social value of the sport. This research is arguably the first of its kind in the sport and therefore an important step in providing a voice for those with visual impairments to speak about their lives and the impact goalball has had on them.

One aim of the research was to explore the role of goalball as a sport in aiding disabled people to be engaged in sport to allow them to fulfil their potential and lead rewarding lives. By providing this marginalised group with an opportunity to voice their thoughts and reflections, it was envisaged that a more nuanced understanding of the benefits disabled people gain from sports participation could be achieved.

Furthermore, the research was designed to calculate the social return on the money spent to fund the sport, to provide a monetary value to accompany the voices of those engaged in the sport. It was hoped that this would aid current knowledge in disabled sports participation, whilst explicitly exploring the under researched sport of goalball.





How this research was conducted

The research adopted a mixed methods approach to answer three research questions: two qualitative and one quantitative. The views and thoughts of visually impaired individuals are largely unknown in goalball, therefore semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data.

Additionally, a social return in investment (SROI) was conducted using data from Goalball UK to calculate the ratio of money invested to social value output. The qualitative interview data was transcribed and analysed to identify common themes and patterns, and these were then reported.

The Goalball Family

For many of the individuals and their families that took part in this research, their disability brought a heightened sense of isolation and loneliness. The finding of goalball and the sense of belonging was valued extremely highly by all players and their family members. The participants used the terminology of the 'Goalball Family' to describe their connectedness.

Furthermore, the participants were willing to travel for extensive lengths of time at significant financial cost just to be involved in the game, showing their dedication and commitment for which in return, they could feel a sense of belonging with others in the same position. For many, the sense of family was due to the uniqueness of the sport; there is no other sport like it that is not adapted from an able-bodied sport and as such, each participant felt equal to everyone else.

Their disability, even if it were to worsen, would not hamper their ability to participate, so they were not afraid to dive in and be involved.

Bonding and bridging capital

Responses from participants suggest a level of support within the goalball network both on and off the court, highlighting how goalball provides the opportunity to develop both bonding and bridging capital.

Several participants discussed how goalball had given them new confidence to try new things, such as applying for university and liaising with non-VI people in restaurants for example. The development of bonding capital was particularly evident when several participants alluded to the sense of belonging to a team.

For many, being visually impaired had previously meant exclusion from team sports, resulting in isolation and loneliness. For some, prior to learning about goalball, they did not participate in any physical activity, but spoke of how goalball renewed their sense of purpose regardless as to their level of sight. This acceptance without question was described as crucial to the participants' sense of wellbeing and gave many the confidence to engage in developing their bridging capital outside of the sport.

The impact of goalball

A common theme that was described by many participants, but particularly by family members, was the impact of goalball on their lives. Although designed as a sport for war veterans' rehabilitation, many participants described an increased understanding and empathy for disabilities.

Participants were asked that if goalball were to no longer be available, for whatever reason, how much would this impact on their lives? The answer was unanimous: massively.

Some participants were emotional at the thought and others cited a likely deterioration with their mental health if they could no longer play. For many family members, their relation's involvement in sport resulted in them becoming involved as coaches and volunteers and the sport became a family event. The impact of the sport on these participants was hugely significant.



The social return on investment

Using data direct from Goalball UK that included participation numbers of players and volunteers as well as input from key stakeholders, the outputs were calculated as health benefits (reduction of diseases/improved good health) of **£307,581** and other benefits including crime and subjective wellbeing of **£1,213,430**. This provided a total amount of outputs of **£1,521,011**.

By adding the total value of the outcomes and then dividing this total by the inputs (**£352,170**), an SROI ratio of 4.31 was calculated.






In other words, for every £1 spent on goalball during the second year of their four-year funding cycle, £4.31 worth of social impact was generated.





10 stories for 10 years of Goalball UK

Introduction by Mark Winder, CEO of Goalball UK

-  “It was important during our 10-year anniversary celebrations we recorded, celebrated and commemorated the milestone with something that captured the spirit and diversity of the ‘Goalball Family’.”
-  “For anyone that’s been involved with goalball, they would have instantly recognised that it’s the people and the community that make it so special. That’s why we worked closely with 10 members of our community, all with different backgrounds, ambitions and experiences, to really demonstrate just how wide and impactful goalball is.”
-  “Each of the participants has a fascinating goalball story to tell. From the grassroots, right the way through to the high-performance side of the game and board level, these stories demonstrate just why we believe so strongly in the power of this sport and offer a glimpse into the journey we have shared with them.”
-  “The sport has not only had a massive impact on the lives of these people, but their tireless effort and commitment to goalball has enabled the sport to grow and prosper in various ways and made it more accessible and inclusive to many more blind and partially sighted people.”
-  “The hardest part of this exercise was deciding just who to enlist as our storytellers.”



1

Clive Spencer

Clive was introduced to goalball back in 1978 when he was the PE teacher at what is now called New College Worcester, the school for blind and partially sighted students.

Out of the blue, a sport and recreation officer from the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) contacted Clive about the possibility of putting together a team of players to compete at the first Goalball World Championships in Austria. Despite not knowing anything about goalball at the time, it was an exciting prospect to learn more about a new sport for visually impaired people.

Managing to get three students from the college to sign up and two more from a 'have a go' session in Sutton Coldfield, Clive and the squad headed off to a small town in the west of the country to compete against teams from across the world.

“I have such fond memories of our first international tournament. Quite honestly, the competition was a bit of a mess, but tremendous fun.”

“The rules of the game were listed on one sheet of paper, but many countries had come up with their own rules, trying to figure out how we actually play the game was the first hurdle. I believe we finished 11th out of 12 teams, so this was a great success considering the circumstances!”

“Back then goalball was very different to the game we know now. The ball we used was essentially a medicine ball. It was very physical and players had to have immense strength to participate at any level.”

From this moment Clive was hooked. He saw first-hand the confidence in movement that playing goalball gave to these visually impaired students and immediately introduced it upon his return to New College Worcester, which at the time was an all-boys school.

Clive linked up with other specialist schools for blind and partially sighted students to introduce them to goalball, such as the all-girls school Chorleywood College. He wanted as many young people as possible to give the budding sport a go.

Goalball had now arrived in the UK and clubs and leagues started popping up across the country as word spread about this exciting new sport. It was the only sport that was specifically designed for people with a visual impairment that wasn't an adaptation of an existing game.

Alongside his teaching role, Clive's blossoming relationship with goalball continued. He supported the game's growth in a number of capacities with the likes of RNIB, British Blind Sport (known as the British Association of Sports and Recreational Activities of the Blind, or BASRAB, at the time) and IBSA (International Blind Sports Federation). He also coached teams and officiated at tournaments nationally and internationally, attending the Paralympics Games as a referee in 1988, 1992, 1996, 2004 and 2008.

Clive worked with British Blind Sport (BBS) to help bring the Goalball European Championships to the UK in Milton Keynes in 1987 and Loughborough in 1993, which was the last time they were held as a single event before splitting into leagues because of the growing number of teams participating. He then worked as the competition manager for BBS at the 2010 World Championships in Sheffield.

At the turn of the millennium came one of the most pivotal moments for Clive's goalball journey. He was asked to coach the Great Britain women's goalball team at the Sydney Paralympics.

“Sydney in 2000 was a remarkable time for myself and for goalball in the UK - it was the first time it felt like the sport had broken into the mainstream.”

“I was asked to coach very late in the day and preparing for such a responsibility was a bit of a whirlwind.”

Despite the eleventh-hour approach, Clive led the women's side to a fifth-place finish, the highest placing of any Great Britain team at a Paralympics to date. However, this team was not exempt from the curse that has blighted many of England's football teams in the past.

“We lost a penalty shootout.”

“We were tied with Spain at the end of the round robin games, so we had to reconvene on court for the shootout. As ever with these things, it was a nail-biting experience. After the first round of six penalties we were still level and it went to sudden death. Unfortunately, it wasn't to be and we were on the plane home.”



Fast-forward eight years and Clive has his sixth taste of the Paralympics in Beijing. This time as a referee he is bestowed with the honour of officiating his first gold medal game, between the hosts China and Lithuania.

“There were 10,000 people in the arena and the atmosphere was fantastic. I believe what transpired in that game is one of the most astonishing moments in the history of goalball.”

“Lithuania were one up with about 45 seconds left on the clock. As many teams do when they have a narrow lead going into the final stages, they used a time-out to recompose and discuss tactics. What was unusual about this was it was their fourth time-out, each team is only allowed three. It took a moment for us to realise what was going on as we were a bit puzzled.”

“Due to this error, the rules dictate that the offending team has to face a penalty. When we made this call the arena full of Chinese supporters erupted and we faced the problem of getting the crowd to be quiet so it could be taken!”

“The Chinese duly dispatched the penalty and the momentum was with them. Their next shot found the back of the net to take home the gold medal in the dying seconds. The roar of the crowd as the final whistle blew is something that will always stay with me. It was a real privilege to be part of such a momentous game.”

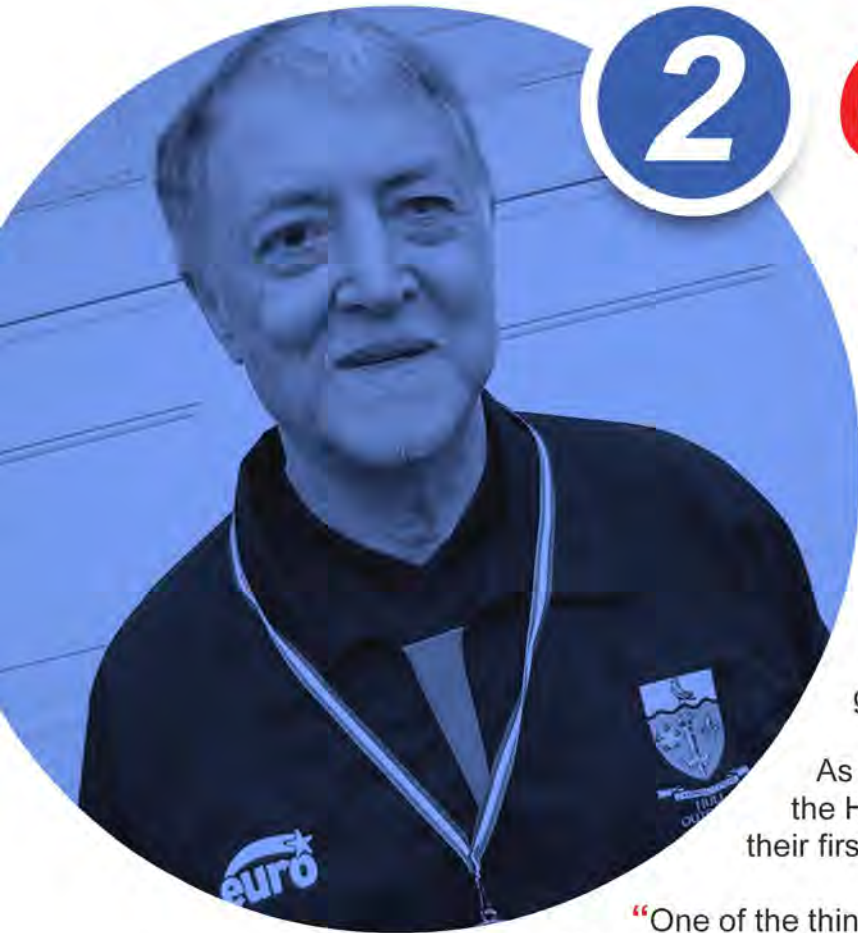
Clive continued officiating at international tournaments until 2011. He is still involved with the Goalball UK National Leagues and is also a trustee at British Blind Sport.

“I can't quite believe how far goalball has come in the UK since its humble beginnings at that tournament in Austria. I love how the game has developed to become more dynamic in terms of the gameplay and the inclusivity for players of all ages, abilities, and even for sighted people.”

“One of the most gratifying things is the awareness of the sport continues to grow. More often than not these days when I say that I am going to a goalball tournament at the weekend, I am not met with a mystified expression and then have to proceed to explain what it actually is!”

“It fills me with immense pride being involved with this sport from the beginning in the UK. It is wonderful that so many people are passionate about it. The work Goalball UK has done in the last decade to provide more opportunities to play than ever is truly transformative for the lives of so many blind and partially sighted people.”





2

Colin Baxter

Colin has been passionate about all sports from a young age, especially playing football at his primary school. However, as a result of detaching both retinas, the opportunities to play anything rough or competitive were limited by the need to preserve his residual vision.

He went on to study law and then took up a post at the University of Hull, where he spent the majority of his career. Although he eventually lost the rest of his sight and thereby the need to take steps to preserve it, the demands of his job and family left little time for sport.

“It wasn’t until I retired in 2004 that I sought new opportunities to keep active and joined a local sports group for visually impaired people. The first time I picked up a goalball at the age of 63 I was instantly hooked. I could play a ball game without the stress of struggling to see the ball and it felt like proper sport. Whenever I took part in a game, I found myself getting the same buzz as I did when I lined up for my school football team at the age of nine.”

As Colin’s legal specialism is the law relating to associations, this expertise helped him to form the Hull Outreach Club. Three months later the team were winning tournaments and collecting their first goalball medals.

“One of the things I loved about goalball was all the debate about tactics and the best way to play.

On goalkeeping principles, I favoured having everyone as far forward as possible and I initially played standing up. You could pull off some fine saves, but, at the higher levels, it was often difficult to get down fast enough, resulting in the classic schoolboy error, the spectacular dive over the top of the ball passing half a yard from your foot!”

Colin gradually got more and more involved with managing sports groups and joined British Blind Sport’s Goalball Committee, eventually becoming its chairperson at what proved to be a critical moment.

Sport England had made further funding conditional on British Blind Sport commissioning an independent report into the management of goalball. This work was undertaken by the late Roger Clifton, a former Great Britain goalball player running a sports development company. After a major consultation process, Roger recommended that goalball should become independent from British Blind Sport.

“This was, in essence, the start of Goalball UK. As the chairperson of the British Blind Sport Goalball Committee, I found myself heavily involved in organising the separation and using my legal skills to assist with drafting Goalball UK’s initial constitution and application to the Charity Commission.”

“Incidentally, the name wasn’t our first choice. It was incredible how many of the alternatives were being hoarded by internet entrepreneurs!”

“In order to manage the transition, it made sense for me to become Goalball UK’s first chairperson. I was in the position for about six months, but it was soon clear that the role demanded more aptitude than I had for networking and forging relationships with key stakeholders. I was strongly in favour of Mike Reilly’s appointment. He had an abundance of these skills and was plainly the right man for that time.”

Since passing over the reins of Goalball UK, Colin has become the chairperson of Blind Cricket England & Wales and continues as chairperson of the Yorkshire VI Cricket Club, for which he’s still an active player. After helping to get the Scarborough Goalball Club going, he finally retired at the age of 72, but remains an avid reader of the Goalball Times.

“It’s great to see so many young visually impaired people giving the sport a go. As in blind cricket, it’s often astonishing to see the massive lift it gives to their confidence and self-esteem. Unfortunately, there are far too many visually impaired individuals who don’t find educational or employment opportunities to match their intelligence and energies. Playing team sports like goalball can provide a new sense of purpose.”

“I would love to see Great Britain teams competing at the Paralympics. Having the sport thrust into the limelight as it was in 2012 would provide a welcome boost to the growth of the game.”

“My one piece of advice for any male thinking about giving goalball a go is not to forget to wear a box! To use a rather off-key metaphor, I’ve got the t-shirt!”





3

Mike Reilly

As a sports fan, working in sports marketing was a dream for Mike Reilly. After selling his business to a top 20 marketing firm, he went on to work with some of the biggest names in English football. With his CV containing the likes of Manchester United, Fulham and Watford, it may have seemed a curious decision to take on a non-executive director role at a little known national governing body (NGB).

“A close friend of my wife’s mentioned to me about the position as a non-executive director at Goalball UK and I was rather hesitant at first. I had no idea what the sport was and really didn’t know if this type of role at an NGB would be suitable for me.”

But Mike was persuaded and he quickly attended a training session.

“I had the same response that so many people do when they first experience goalball, I was completely engrossed by it. The players caught my attention the most, their talent and passion for the game was incredible. I was hooked!”

Mike joined Goalball UK nine months after it was formed in 2010. But in the early stages of the NGB it was experiencing numerous growing pains as it looked to establish itself. Within a year the then chairperson and chief executive had decided to move on and the organisation was at a point where it needed stability and guidance.

“On behalf of the board I met with our two key stakeholders – UK Sport and Sport England – to discuss how we could get over the present predicaments and ensure the sustainability of Goalball UK. Three parts of the organisation urgently needed addressing - financial systems and processes, governance, and internal communications. This was one of the most important meetings that we had in this period as it gave us a common goal to work towards to attempt to get everything on track.”

Mike quickly did some firefighting and then got a call from Sport England to ask if he would consider being joint chairperson and chief executive to get the organisation on a better footing.

“I was again initially reluctant to take on more responsibility at Goalball UK, but at the same time I did feel like it was something I had to do to take the organisation forward. Thankfully things progressed very quickly, we gained the confidence of our two critical stakeholders and they became willing to support us.”

“Governance, not my favourite subject, was an interesting one. After a lot of hard work, we managed to jump from red, with the danger of being closed down, to a greenlight status, which was the envy of many other sports. It was curious to be approached by much more established NGBs for advice on how to improve their own practices!”

Shortly after steadying the ship, another colossal task was on the horizon for Mike – the London Paralympics.

“It was imperative that there was a Great Britain team at the Paralympics on home soil. We knew that we had the talent within our ranks, but the performances leading up to the Games hadn’t really represented that. The British Paralympics Association (BPA) needed assurances that the teams were not going to be out of their depth on the biggest stage of them all.”

“I recall producing many presentations for the BPA about the progress both the men and women were making and why they deserved to be in the competition. We really did everything we could to convince them of the quality in the squad. All the hard work of the Goalball UK staff and players came down to a simple yes or no from the BPA.”

“I was told that we would be informed of their decision at noon on a certain day. As soon as the clock struck midday my phone rang and I will never forget that phone call, it was one of the most nerve-racking moments in my career.”

“Before I could speak, they said, “Mike, I have two pieces of good news for you...” and at that moment the sense of relief I felt was not like anything I had ever experienced. All the hard work everyone had put in had paid off and we were going to the Paralympics with two teams!”

For Mike, being at the Paralympics with the Great Britain goalball teams was one of the highlights of his tenure. However, in typical British fashion, the teams did not go about it in an easy way.

“We proved many people wrong at the Paralympics and showed that we can compete with the best goalball teams in the world. The women’s side, in particular, exceeded all our expectations making it into the quarter-finals.”



“The drama of that quarter-final game was incredible. The team was so close to progressing but were eventually undone by a golden goal. At the end of the game I was initially deflated, but also filled with such an enormous sense of pride, not just because of the sensational performances, but for the entire organisation that had got us to this point.”

“Hearing the immense crowd packed in the Copper Box cheering on our teams and our sport was a real vindication of what we had been striving to achieve. What we managed to do in such a short space of time was a mammoth effort. But it is something I would happily do again to see the look on the players' faces as they walked out on to the court to represent their country at the world's biggest competition.”

Alongside the highs on the international stage, Mike knew that to grow goalball in the UK and to have another shot at Paralympic glory, the grassroots side of the game needed to be reformed to give better stability and the best opportunity for talented athletes emerging from their local clubs.

“After the exposure we received from the performances at the Paralympics we knew that there could be a boost in people wanting to take up the sport. It was important to give the best possible experience to those people that came into goalball. We wanted to create a legacy and needed them to continue playing after the buzz of the Paralympics had died down.”

Mike and the Goalball UK team also introduced the End of Season tournament, which to this day is a staple of the goalball calendar.

“I loved the End of Season tournament we introduced for all the clubs across the country. It gave each player the opportunity from all levels to come together to celebrate everything goalball was about. The annual event also allowed us to reflect on how the game was growing, share what was going on regionally and offer ideas about what else could be done.”

Looking back on the last decade of goalball in the UK, Mike notes how much the game had changed for the better, from the grassroots to the elite level.





“Goalball appears much faster and more competitive than I imagined it would be when I started working in the sport. The teams and structure that are now in place mean we can get more people playing and nurture the talent coming through. My overall ambition when I started was to boost the numbers playing because I saw early on what a positive impact it can have for those with no or limited sight.”

“I’m proud we came up with the tagline ‘Transforming People’s Lives’, it really says it all. Goalball provides such a fantastic opportunity for visually impaired people to connect with each other, alongside keeping fit and active. To see the foundations that we put in place, how the NGB has developed and expanded, is so satisfying.”

“Of course, it is fundamentally all about the participants - incredible individuals, passionate and awe inspiring. I still keep very much up-to-date with everything that is going on within the world of goalball and I love hearing about the amazing achievements of the clubs and players up and down the country.”

When the time came for Mike to move on from his role and pass over the reins, the VI community made a lasting impression on him. This led him to start volunteering with The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association.

“Even though I am not involved with goalball anymore, the community of remarkable people continues to amaze me. I still wanted to give back, so I decided to volunteer as a sighted guide. So, once a week I take a person that has issues with their sight out and about to help them to become more active and independent.”

4

Sarah Stephenson-Hunter



Sarah had a difficult childhood growing up on the north east coast of England. As a partially sighted youngster, who also suffered with juvenile arthritis, opportunities to play sport at school and connect with her peers were incredibly limited.

That was until she attended Nottingham Trent University in the early 1990s and was introduced to a wealth of sports for people with disabilities, including goalball.

“Goalball in the early 90s was very different to the game we know now. We played without pads, the ball was much heavier and the game in general was a lot less organised. However, it was very competitive and I really loved that nature of the sport. It was something that was completely new to me and I relished the opportunity.”

“What remains the same from the 90s to the present day is the community of players. No matter who you played for, there was a real sense of comradery, unity and togetherness between the players. It was our sport, specifically designed for people like us, and we all absolutely loved it. As we were all in the same boat, it removed so many barriers and we could all just be ourselves. We didn’t have to be concerned with all the things people with no or limited sight often are.”

When Sarah finished university, unfortunately, she found that opportunities to continue playing goalball were once again limited as her career and personal life took priority.

Fast forward over a decade and that all changed when Sarah started a role at the University of Nottingham as a disability advisor. Here she worked with Hannah Webber, the university’s disability sport officer, and Faye Dale, who was the sports and leisure officer for My Sight Nottinghamshire; the local society for the blind at the time.

The trio went about setting up the Nottinghamshire Sheriff’s Goalball Club, which has since gone on to be one of the biggest in the UK.

“Setting up the goalball club at the university was something I was really eager to be involved with. Our ambition was for it not to be exclusive to the students, but benefit the blind and partially sighted community throughout the city and beyond too. Having a goalball club here for people of all ages was important to me as it was something that I knew I would have gained so much from when I was younger.”

As well as playing an important role setting up the club and recruiting players, Sarah also got back on the court for the first time in a number of years.

“We worked hard to cobble a team together and it was tremendous fun to get in between the goal posts again. Some players were very new to the sport, and others, like myself, were a little rusty! It’s funny to look back on now – albeit slightly embarrassing at the time - we did learn the meaning of the ‘mercy rule’ the harsh way soon after establishing the club. So, if a team is winning by 10 goals, their opponents are put out of their misery and the game is stopped!”

In 2013, Sarah embarked on a major journey to begin gender transition treatment.

“When I was going through my transition, I always remained adamant that I wanted to carry on playing goalball, as well as cricket. Of course, there was a slight apprehension as I had no idea how people would react. I first spoke with Hannah and Faye to see if they could foresee any issues and they were very supportive. It was a new situation for them and they handled it so kindly and sensitively.”

“Upon my return to the goalball community I was welcomed back with open arms. I can honestly say that I have never had any problems within our club or at any tournaments. Everyone involved in the sport is so very determined to provide total inclusivity, especially at the tournaments that we play because men and women compete on a level playing field. This transitional period was very difficult for a number of reasons, but I was so grateful to have the wonderful support of the communities at my sporting outlets. The togetherness and comradery, as well as everyone’s understanding was so significant for my wellbeing.”





“There is one particular goalball memory that will always remain with me. We organised a varsity game between both universities in Nottingham and I was awarded the female player of the game shortly after going through my transition! It might seem small, but for me at that time, it was a massive boost to my confidence as I felt truly accepted for being myself.”

Off the court, Sarah was one of the 15 blind and partially sighted players (supported by a team of sighted volunteers) who completed The Way of the Roses, a 170-mile ride from Morecambe to Bridlington on tandem bikes in four days, to raise funds for Goalball UK.

Sarah finally retired from playing a couple of years ago and recently moved to Oxford. She is no longer involved with her former club, but she remains thankful for the opportunity goalball gave to her and others like her.

“Playing goalball has given me so much confidence and positivity in my life. It’s so great to see how it’s come on in leaps and bounds since I first played it. Here’s to bigger and better things in the next 10 years!”



5

Phil Green

Phil Green was affectionately known as 'Phil Cricket' as he was always found playing for his local VI cricket club in Yorkshire. Although, the larger-than-life character confessed that sometimes his favourite part of the sport was getting into the clubhouse after a match and enjoying a few beers with his teammates.

At that time in his late 20s, Phil was a heavy drinker and 20-a-day smoker, weighing in at around 21 stone. He recognised that something needed to change in 2010.

“I still love playing cricket, but often I was more interested in the social aspect of the sport and that was starting to have an impact on my health. I was drinking too much and always had a cigarette in my mouth. During that period, my main source of activity was playing cricket, which can often be a bit slow, and I wasn't really pushing myself.”

“A friend of mine suggested that we head over to Leeds to check out the local goalball club. My first reaction was that I thought the sport was a bit silly and that it would be too easy. But after some convincing I agreed to give it a go.”

“I don't want to say that I was a natural, but my first shot did go in! That was a real buzz and from that point, I was hooked. However, I certainly underestimated goalball as I would eventually learn just how demanding it can be.”

“I'll always remember my first tournament. I actually got lost on the court and all I could hear was a few people on the side giggling as I was aimlessly wandering around – that moment I knew that I had a lot more to learn.”

Over the next couple of years, Phil started to rise the ranks and built up a reputation in the Goalball UK National League, becoming one of the best players at the elite level. Due to his size and power, he developed a formidable shot that even many seasoned goalballers wouldn't want to be on the receiving end of. At the end of 2012, Phil's talent was spotted by the Great Britain team and he was asked to attend their training sessions.

“When I first got involved with Great Britain, I thought to myself that these guys were colossal! The team included the likes of Adam Knott at the time, people who had been around this set-up for a few years, and they were throwing absolute rockets. To be honest, I was feeling a bit out of my depth. However, Kathryn Fielding and Faye Dale inspired me to give it my best. I started to improve and became part of the team.”

“There was serious competition for places for Great Britain, as well as a lack of funding. So unfortunately, I didn’t get to play for the national team at any tournaments overseas. What is probably my proudest goalball memory is the first time I pulled on the red Great Britain jersey at a tournament in Hereford.”

Being involved with the Great Britain squad, as well as a top elite player, brought other, more unofficial, responsibilities that Phil relished.

“When you’re involved at the highest level of goalball, the younger players and those new to the sport look up to you, which is something that I love. At every opportunity, I would always work with them to share tips and help improve their game. It wasn’t just me who did this, it was so prevalent throughout the goalball community.”

“Especially those that had just begun playing, I would always make the point that it’s not about winning or losing, at this stage they should just have fun, embrace the sport and make friends – the competitive stuff will come later on. Goalball is so key to the confidence of many young visually impaired people. We want everyone coming for the first time to feel welcome and go away with a great experience.”

Since Phil became involved in the top level of goalball, his health and fitness dramatically changed. He ultimately stopped drinking and smoking, as well as losing a significant amount of weight.

“Goalball has had so many positive influences on my life. The level of the sport I was playing at really inspired me to get in shape and kick the bad habits. I got my weight down to around 13 stone, which was an amazing personal achievement for me. I also met my best mate, Dave Butler, who was the best man at my wedding, through goalball.”





However, the physically demanding nature of goalball started to take its toll on Phil. He decided to take a break from playing the sport and focus on coaching.

“I was in the best shape of my life, but all the diving around and taking big hits from the heavy ball was really battering and bruising me. My body was struggling and for a short while I fell out of love with the sport and needed a bit of time away. I still wanted to keep active and not undo all the hard work I had put in to get healthy. So, I spoke with Kathryn and she suggested that I take part in my local parkrun. This ignited what is now another passion in my life – running.”

“It didn’t take long for me to catch the running bug. I loved that there was no pressure involved with these 5k runs. I could go at my own pace – either taking it steady or pushing myself. Over time I naturally started to get faster and faster and decided to look at other events I could take part in.”

“I have now done many 10k runs, half marathons, triathlons and I have also completed the York Marathon three times. My next goal is to complete a half IronMan in 2021. I definitely blame Kathryn for this obsession! I would love for more goalballers to join me on a parkrun.”

Phil has since returned to goalball and rediscovered his passion for the sport. He now plays for Phoenix Blaze (at elite level) and West Yorkshire (at intermediate level) as well as helping to coach at training sessions and tournaments.

“I have a rare condition, which means that my sight is either a B2 or B3 depending on the sun, but it is likely to deteriorate further over time. I want to make the most of what vision I have until I eventually lose it. This inspires me every day to keep pushing myself, taking on new challenges and to carry on doing what I love. I know that whatever happens, I will always have goalball and this community.”



6

Naqib Ahmed

In his early teens growing up in Birmingham, Naqib Ahmed was a promising footballer, playing for West Bromwich Albion's PAN disability and partially sighted teams. However, at the age of 15 his sight started to deteriorate further and playing football became too difficult. From this point, he significantly reduced his sporting activity to focus on his studies.

After getting good grades at his GCSEs, Naqib enrolled at New College Worcester. The college gave him the opportunity to experience a range of new sports – including goalball.

“Starting at New College Worcester was the best thing I could have done at that time. I had almost given up on playing sports, but with the great facilities and staff, it really encouraged me to start playing again.”

“Goalball first stood out because at the time I had no idea what it was. The fact that it was specifically designed for people like me was appealing, especially as no matter what vision you had, everyone was on a level playing field. Although, playing in complete darkness was pretty scary at first!”

Naqib started off in the Goalball UK National League with New College Worcester's novice team in September 2015, but was quickly promoted to the intermediate team. His natural talent for the game was spotted by Faye Dale, who is the head coach for the Great Britain men's squad and involved with the Talent Pathway scheme for aspiring athletes.

“I was pretty shy at first when I started competing at Goalball UK tournaments. But the fantastic community of people playing the sport made it so easy to integrate and become a member of the family. It doesn't matter where you come from or what your background is, everyone is in a similar position and we are all equal. There is a real sense of comradery, we all share tips about how to improve and each player has the backing of the community to do their best.”

“My progression at the beginning was quite quick. Although, making that leap from novice to intermediate was big and it took some getting used to. It was one of the first shots I faced that really brought that home for me. It smashed me in the chest and then I properly realised what I was up against!”

In a little over a year and after finding the net 23 times at intermediate level, Naqib was invited to take part at a Great Britain talent camp where he got the opportunity to train with and compete against some of the best players in the country. The talent camps are an opportunity for Goalball UK to evaluate the emerging talent coming through and decide if they're ready for international tournaments in the youth squads.

“At this stage I knew I was developing into a pretty decent player, but I didn't imagine I was anywhere near good enough for the Great Britain squads. I was still young and was not happy with my weight, so the call up to the talent camp came as a bit of a surprise. However, I embraced the opportunity and gave it my best shot. I remember thinking at the end just how strong and technically gifted these guys were in the Great Britain squad.”

However, Faye and the team hosting the talent camp identified that Naqib had the potential to perform on the international stage. They pulled him to one side and spoke openly about his development, how far they think he can go and invited him to be part of the Great Britain youth team.

Naqib's first opportunity to represent Great Britain came at a youth tournament in Denmark in May 2017. He went on to establish himself as one of the brightest prospects in the development squad. Naqib was the third highest scorer at a tournament in Malmo and then played an integral part as the team claimed the bronze medal at a tournament in Lithuania. In 2019, Naqib was selected for the team to compete in the European Youth Games in Finland.

“This was the first major tournament that I represented Great Britain in. It was a weeklong event and it really felt like I was a proper Great Britain player at this tournament, as the quality of teams we were up against was much stronger than we had faced before. We slightly tweaked the tactics and I was moved to the centre. It certainly paid off as I personally felt like I played some of my best goalball and we went on to claim another bronze medal!”





Naqib's impressive performances did not go unnoticed and he has since been called up to the senior Great Britain men's team. His rising stature in the game has given him a new drive to maintain the best possible physical condition he can.

“Since joining the senior Great Britain squad, I have managed to lose over two stone. Goalball at this level is physically demanding, it is so important that I ensure I am in the best shape possible at all times to keep progressing. This is something that I didn't take so seriously before but having goalball and a new impetus has certainly made me even more determined to keep up with this side of being an athlete.”

Naqib attributes his progression on the court to the coaching work he has also been doing. Since he has become a coach at his hometown club in Birmingham, the teams have performed well at novice and intermediate levels, earning medals in various tournaments, and are on their way to establishing an elite team.

“Again, Faye was really important in the decision I took to start coaching. She encouraged me to try it and I definitely think it has given me a better understanding of tactics and the rules. Being on the side lines with a visual impairment gives you a different appreciation of the game. Having the opportunity to deliver instructions and work with the younger players will definitely hold me in good stead when I next get the Great Britain jersey on and line up on court.”



7

Robert Avery

Robert Avery's journey to become one of the highest regarded goalball referees in the game started back in 2010. He had been working in the rehabilitation of visually impaired people since 1983 and so had been aware of goalball for many years, but it wasn't until much later that he got his first experience of the sport in action.

“For quite some time access for people to play goalball was pretty limited. It was predominantly available at a handful of clubs around the country or in specialist schools. I moved down south from Glasgow to take a role at York St John University to continue my work in enhancing life opportunities for blind and partially sighted people. Following on from the World Championships taking place in Sheffield in 2010, I was approached by two of our students who had volunteered, one from physiotherapy and the other from sport, about whether we could do something positive with the inspirational experience they had.”

“The rehabilitative potential of the sport and the positive impact it could have on the lives of those that were participating fitted with our professional backgrounds and it gave myself and my colleagues an overwhelming drive to work to increase the awareness of the sport so that more people could have the same opportunity as the players at the World Championships.”

“We decided the best way to do this was to start our own club in York. We wanted it to be a real community club that is open to people of all ages and abilities.”

Less than 12 months later, the club was established with Robert coaching the team. The York Goalball Club entered the National League at novice level but soon rose the ranks. The team gained the reputation as one of the most up-and-coming clubs in the UK.

“Before I knew it, I was spending every Saturday morning coaching the club, and in the summer months before I went off to play cricket in the afternoon. Even though the club was separate from the university, York St. John were really supportive of what we were doing and allowed us to use their facilities free of charge. We were incredibly fortunate and extremely grateful for this, as the costs of hiring a sports hall is the main obstacle for many goalball clubs.”

“As the team started to get better, competing at the top end of the Goalball UK National Leagues, that’s when I decided to start my training to become a referee. In all honesty, I had little intention of actually being an official, I saw it as a chance to learn the game inside out so I could potentially spot opportunities to bend the rules in our favour!”

“However, often the referees at national tournaments can become stretched as there are sometimes very few, so I started officiating matches more and more. I had previously umpired cricket matches, so I think those experiences and my general calmness helped me to oversee goalball contests.”

“I suppose I really caught the bug for refereeing and carried on progressing by doing more training courses. This then led me to take part in refereeing at my first international tournament in Bruges.”

“This was really different compared to officiating in the UK where I knew everyone playing, which was just like overseeing a game between friends. On the international stage, there wasn’t the same relaxed atmosphere. There was also the added pressure of representing my country. A few of the coaches at this tournament would try pushing their luck because they recognised that I was new to officiating. But the games were always played in the right spirit and I thoroughly enjoyed my first taste of international goalball.”

Robert continued his upward trajectory in the refereeing world, similar to that of an international elite goalball player. He was a referee at the European C Championship in 2015, the B’s in 2016 and then the A’s in 2017. Since gaining his goalball refereeing qualification eight years ago, Robert has refereed at 80 domestic tournaments. He has also had the opportunity to officiate international tournaments across the world, including Sweden, Bulgaria, Portugal, Lithuania, The Netherlands and America.

However, it is the summer of 2021 which is going to be the biggest milestone to date in Robert’s refereeing journey, as he will officiate at the Paralympics in Tokyo.

“I am really proud to be heading to Tokyo next summer to be part of the Paralympics. When I started officiating goalball games, I couldn’t have imagined that I would be a part of one of the biggest sporting events in the world. I was lucky enough to be at London 2012 with Goalball UK, which was an incredible experience to be in the Copper Box and witness that atmosphere first-hand.”





Robert hopes that his experiences will inspire more budding officials to take the plunge and become goalball referees.

“There are a number of things that I could say to someone thinking about giving it a go, but the main thing to do is learn the rules inside out. Having that knowledge to fall back on is massively important when overseeing a game of goalball. It might sound obvious, but the ability to remain calm in a stressful situation is also vital. And finally, like any occupation, personal development is essential. After tournaments I’ll always find some time to watch back the games that I officiated to analyse my performance to see where I can improve.”

“It is also so much fun being a goalball official. There is a lot made of the community of players in goalball, but we officials are also very much part of that. What’s more, the officials have our own separate communities set up for us to discuss the game and certain players and coaches to look out for, as well as sharing tips and insights.”

Off the court, Robert has been pivotal in harnessing the relationship with York St John University and Goalball UK, which has seen the Great Britain men’s team work with staff and use the university’s facilities for strength and conditioning training.

“We recognised that there is massive potential to support Goalball UK, the athletes and the development of the sport in general at York St John University.”

“I knocked at many doors to get colleagues at the university interested in goalball. Being an international referee definitely helped to raise the profile of the sport at the university and now plans are coming to fruition. Students have been researching injury prevention and the sporting development of elite goalball players. This work is the first of its kind for goalball in the UK.”

“This has been a highly collaborative scheme so far, with a great deal of knowledge being shared between Goalball UK and York St John University. We hope that this will have a positive impact for everyone involved with goalball for generations to come - from the players from grassroot to elite level, to the officials up and down the country.”



8

Kali Holder

Kali Holder's journey to the elite level of goalball started from simply wanting to do more with her weekends. As a teenager with a visual impairment, she was eager to find new challenges. Upon joining a local youth club for visually impaired people, a close friend told her of an exciting sport taking place in Winchester, a little under two hours away from her hometown.

“Playing for Winchester was such a fantastic introduction to goalball. The club was set up perfectly for new players of all abilities and everyone was so welcoming.”

“With the club being quite a distance away from my home, as well as learning the sport, I also learnt a number of life skills at the same time. Stuff like getting the train alone can be quite daunting when you are partially sighted, but taking the initiative at a pretty young age definitely helped me to become much more independent.”

Kali played her first season for Winchester at novice level and her natural talent for the sport was quickly spotted. She was invited into the talent pathway, the programme to develop younger players for the Great Britain squads. Shortly after this she was on the plane to her first international youth tournament in Finland.

“Each member of the team was still pretty new to the sport, so we weren't so great! But this didn't matter at the time as the overall experience was fantastic. At this tournament I made lifelong friends and met people that I am still playing goalball with to this day.”

“Being at an international tournament and seeing what other countries were doing, as well as how talented they all were, was a big moment for me. I was in awe, learning new skills and rules simply by watching games. This allowed me to see what can be achieved, but also gave me the desire to improve myself as a player.”

“As well as the sporting side, this tournament was a learning curve in many other ways. Even though we were the youth team, we were still representing Great Britain and the expectations were on us to behave like the senior team.”

“The National League tournaments are so great for younger players. They are really inclusive and you get to chat with and learn from the more experienced athletes. At every tournament I was encouraged by the coaches to make an effort to ask questions and watch as many games as possible, it really helped my development.”

“I always loved watching and learning from Laura Perry, she is definitely the goalballer that I look up to the most. She always scored loads of goals and that attacking style of play was something that I wanted to emulate and base my game on.”

In 2016, Kali got called up for the first time to the senior Great Britain women’s team for the European B Championships in Portugal. Despite being on the fringes of the squad, the team put on a remarkable display, winning gold and securing promotion to the top league.

“Having that experience to be in and around the senior squad at that time was such an important part of my goalball career. It was hard watching from the bench, especially at nail biting times, but it’s important to remember that it is a team game and the guys on the court were incredible.”

From this point, Kali’s standing in the game continued to grow and now she is firmly established in the senior Great Britain team. She has gone on to travel to more than 10 different countries to play goalball and has become the focal point in Great Britain’s attacking play. At international tournaments, she can often be found at the top end of the goal scoring charts.

“There have been a few ups and downs being part of the Great Britain goalball squad over the last few years, but I think right now we are in a good place. We have a stable squad of fantastic players and Aaron Ford, the head coach, has improved us all so much.”

“There are many younger players with an abundance of potential coming through the talent pathway and with hard work could come into the team if we’re not performing. This competition for places really drives us on to perform to the very best of our abilities and not get complacent.”





“Obviously, the overall ambition for us all is to make it to the Paralympics and we were so close last year to realising that dream. There is still a chance that we could make it to Tokyo, but that is out of our hands for the time being. We are focused on being in the best shape possible if we get the opportunity.”

“As many of us playing for Great Britain or coming through the development programme are studying at RNC, we have much more access to great facilities that we normally wouldn't have. From time on the court to working out in the gym and access to coaches - the resources at our disposal here have definitely enabled us to improve and compete with the best in the world.”

As well as her ambitions to play goalball at the biggest competition in the sport, Kali also has more targets that she wants to achieve a little closer to home. She has supported many of Goalball UK's initiatives to get younger people into the sport, such as the schools programme funded by Children in Need, and she also delivers goalball sessions in her local community for Brighton & Hove Albion Football Club.

“Despite still being young myself, I really love working with children and younger players coming into the sport. I hope that by sharing my passion some of the people I work with will have the same amazing experience with goalball that I am currently having – whether that's at the elite level or just making friends and gaining confidence.”

“My main piece of advice for any youngsters getting started with the sport is perseverance. Goalball is a lot harder than it initially looks, but if you keep going it is so rewarding and so much fun.”



9

Croysutt Warriors

(Tommy & Sally Britton and Robin Faulkner)

The story of how Croysutt Warriors became one of the most active goalball clubs in the country starts with Robin Faulkner. Robin is the chairperson of the largest table tennis club in Croydon, South Croydon Table Tennis Club, and in 2014 he was approached to be a community sport partner for Street Games, the initiative that uses sport to create positive change in the lives of disadvantaged people.

“Street Games is a fantastic cause and I loved being involved with the project. I helped to modify versions of sports that can be delivered everywhere without a formal setting. As part of the ongoing work, we were looking for sports that were truly inclusive and after some research we discovered goalball, which fits the bill perfectly.”

“The main purpose was to establish a goalball club in Croydon and ensure its sustainability, but at the time, we had little idea how that might be achieved! So, in 2014, I reached out to Goalball UK and Alex Bunney really helped us to get the ball rolling with a few taster sessions. It only took two months before we hosted our first session and Alex encouraged us to start doing them fortnightly.”

“The early sessions were patchy for numbers, but my philosophy with these things is to provide consistency. I don’t believe that if at one session no one turns up - which we did have – then the next session should be cancelled. This is particularly true when dealing with any group of differently abled people. They need time to be comfortable with the venue, the travel and the atmosphere before they will be willing to commit to a longer-term relationship with a club or organisation. We persevered and along came Tommy Britton.”

At this time, it was not long since Tommy Britton had lost his sight, and with that, his career as a chef. Tommy recalls that at the time he was in a bad place and was seriously struggling with his mental health.

“I found my visual impairment very isolating and became quite reclusive. I was in a physical slump. That was before I had contact with my rehabilitation officer for the visually impaired, Greg, who pulled me out of the mire. It was he who nagged me into trying goalball. It took a little while for me to finally attend a session. But as soon as I did, from the first ball I became absolutely hooked by the sport and I couldn't get enough of it.”

“At the beginning, one of the most amazing things that I found about the sport was that it was helping me to relearn old skills which I lost with my sight. It's stuff that we can take for granted, like being confident enough to take public transport alone. But the belief I got from playing goalball gave me the determination to become more independent.”

“It was at these taster sessions that I met Robin, who has become a really good friend. He inspired me to work with him to help get the club off the ground as it was evident the positive impact that goalball has for visually impaired people. I wanted everyone that was like me to experience the benefits of this sport.”

After playing goalball for a while, Tommy encouraged his family to get involved with Croysutt Warriors. Now his wife Sally and daughter Tiffany-Jade, who are both sighted, play alongside him.

Sally recalls, “It was really emotional seeing Tommy develop into a good goalball player and watching him grow stronger by the day, like the man he was before the tough times started. We both believe that without goalball, he would have not retrained professionally to become a psychologist and set up his own business.

“I love playing alongside my husband and daughter, it has been great for our family. It has made us even closer and it has also given me an insight into his life and the impact it had on him. Goalball has also been massively important for Tiffany-Jade, who has a form of autism. The sport has taught her so many new skills that have really helped her with day-to-day life.”





With the Britton's on board and Robin as chairperson, Croysutt Warriors have continued to go from strength to strength. They entered their first tournament in September 2015 and have since had teams in every national competition they have been eligible for.

Along the way, Croysutt Warriors were the Novice Shield winners in 2016/17 and 2018/19, the South and East Regional League winners in 2018/19, and collected a number of gold, silver and bronze medals at intermediate level, along with several individual honours. Whilst at novice level, they produced a magnificent unbroken streak of six gold medals.

Croysutt Warriors have also performed on the international stage at the Malmö Open. They won all but one game and their team had the tournament's top - and record for the competition – goal scorer Jack Peters.

“The progression the club has made makes me really proud.” Robin says.

“However, what is really special is witnessing the journey our players go on. Most are timid and hesitant at first, but they often blossom into more confident, fitter, happier people who are at ease with their different ability. This is at the heart of what we're doing.”

For Tommy, being part of a club that is developing into a real asset to his hometown and community is something that he is particularly proud of.

“This club continues to amaze me. We have gone above and beyond what we thought would be possible and we continue to outgrow ourselves. A real indication of how far we have come is that people around here know who we are and what goalball is. Even a few years ago we couldn't have imagined that. The inclusive community aspect of the club is massively important to me - we want the club to be accessible to everyone. Regardless of age, ability or level of sight, we want people to come along, have a good time and make some new friends.”

“We estimate that so far we have had around 70 different people from the local area either play for Croysutt Warriors or attend training. Considering that we started a few years ago from nothing, this is massive for us. However, we know that there are so many more people out there that could really benefit from our club, so the hard work continues to reach these people and encourage them to have a go. To do this, we have also been ramping up our fundraising efforts.”

As the club has continued to evolve and the networking in the community has grown, Sally has become more involved on the operations side of the club and is now the treasurer.

“I’ve experienced first-hand what a goalball club can do to someone’s wellbeing, so I was really eager to help out in any way that I could so that we can be there for more people. Our main goal is to keep going with the great progress we have made so far. For me personally, this experience has given me a new outlook and I try to help out in the community in other ways too. For instance, last Christmas we took the time to help the homeless and I provided haircuts at the local crisis centre.”

With Croysutt Warriors now firmly established as a flagship goalball club, the team now moves on to the next stage of its development. Robin says, “We must consolidate our gains so far and provide succession planning for the future. The aim is to continue to make steady progress and we want to have at least two competitive teams at every level the game is played domestically. It is also really important for us to continue to spread the sport throughout our region and increase the work we do in schools.

“That’s not to say that we do not have big ambitions for Croysutt Warriors and the sport. I think the dream for all of us is to one day help to create a dedicated goalball centre in the South East.”



10

Josh Windle & Josh McEntee



For those that have attended Goalball UK national league tournaments, many will have noticed that best friends Josh Windle and Josh McEntee are often as thick as thieves before and after games. The pair, who met through goalball, both have remarkably paralleled stories.

When they were similar ages in their early twenties, both were involved in accidents that resulted in sight loss. Naturally, for those that have lived for many years with full vision, for it to be gone in an instant is incredibly difficult to cope with.

Josh Windle recounts his journey: “After my accident and losing my sight I was in a really bad place. I had always been pretty sporty, so not having that in my life anymore was particularly difficult.”

“I don’t think I had left the house for almost six months and it was hard to find the confidence and motivation to do so. But when I first started going out again one of the first conversations was with Citizens Advice, who told me about a local blind charity in Selby. Through them the first thing I attended was a goalball event put on by Kathryn Fielding. It blew my mind that the sport even existed!”

“From there, Kathryn invited me to join the West Yorkshire Goalball Club and I just fell in love with the game. Unfortunately, due to my injuries I haven’t progressed at a pace I would like, but I am loving the journey.”

For Josh McEntee, following his accident, as well as losing his sight, both of his legs had to be rebuilt and he needed to learn to walk again. He worked closely with rehabilitation officers for the visually impaired in his local area and was convinced that goalball could be a great way for him to get back into sport to rebuild his strength.

“When I started to play goalball, it was a major milestone in my journey of recovery and inspired me to live my life to the full once again. I met Josh at one of my first Goalball UK National League tournaments when I was playing for Lancashire Lions and we instantly hit it off.”

“When Josh and I first became friends, having someone that I could relate with through our personal experience was so important. I kept thinking “if he can do it, then so can I.”

“This was not only in regards to playing and excelling at goalball, but with many other obstacles that you face after losing your sight.”

Speaking about their friendship, Josh Windle said: “It really is a long road with loads of ups and downs when you’re coming to terms with sight loss. As Josh and I clicked, we were really able to bounce off each other. We obviously have what we had experienced in common, but there are so many more things we share that really enabled us to motivate each other to keep pushing ourselves. “When you have a bad day, having someone like Josh that you can rely on is so important. He’s an incredibly loyal friend. We’re always there for each other through the good and difficult times.”

With their newly found confidence and friendship, both Josh Windle and McEntee are more determined than ever to demonstrate this on the goalball court.

Josh Windle said: “When I think back to my performances when I first started to where I am now, it really is unrecognisable. I would love to play for the Great Britain men’s team one day and having this goal to aim for, with the support of my family and friends, is something that motivates me each time I step on to the court. The coaches that I have worked with, such as Faye Dale at talent camps, have really inspired this belief that I can achieve so much playing goalball.”

“At this stage it is all about keeping myself surrounded by great people and continuing to develop my game. The sport might appear simple from the outside, but when you’re actually on the court you realise just how complex it is. I have always been a fairly competitive person, so having goalball in my life now really complements me as a person.”

“It has also been fantastic that my partner Kellie has also embraced the sport. She has been with me through everything and is now coaching and helping out at West Yorkshire. It makes the sport so much more special to be able to share it with the people that are closest to me. I now truly believe that I can overcome any obstacle – my transformation from just after my accident to now has been amazing.”



Josh McEntee reflects on his passion for the sport: “I fell in love with goalball instantly as it is so intense and challenging. From the outset, I have always had the ambition to be the best I can be and represent Great Britain.”

“In 2018, I was selected for the Great Britain men’s squad and got to compete with the team for the first time in Budapest that year. It was an incredibly nerve-wracking experience but I’m so proud of what we achieved. Playing for my country at an international tournament is one of the highlights of my goalball journey so far. At this stage of my goalball career, I really want to focus on staying as fit as possible as I am prone to the occasional injury.”

Josh McEntee attributes the new found self-belief he discovered from his goalball experiences to many more positive changes that have taken place in his life – from setting up his own charity and getting into property development, to having the motivation to travel the world.

“So much that I have learned from goalball that has enabled me to overcome my sight loss have allowed me to make significant strides in other aspects of my life. The sport teaches you so much, from solving problems to becoming more self-sufficient, it was really important for me to use this to try to make a difference elsewhere.”

“That is why I have set up Inner Strength Sports, an organisation that teaches martial arts to those with sight loss and other disabilities. From when I lost my sight it has always been a massive goal for me to use the power of sport to give something back. This venture will allow me to utilise so many of the skills that goalball has taught me and hopefully help people with disabilities realise the incredible amount they can achieve.”

Josh McEntee concludes: “My progression in the sport has been fairly rapid, as it only took around two years to break into the Great Britain set-up, and my overall ambition is to one day represent my country at the Paralympics. But it is just as important for me that my friends, like Josh, and my teammates are doing well and getting the most out of the sport as possible.”





How can you help?

As a registered charity we are dependent on donations and grants. Below is an example of what it costs us to transform more lives:

- **£250,000** to help propel one of our national teams towards Paralympic Games qualification.
- **£35,000** to appoint a Development Officer in each Home National each year.
- **£20,000** to operate a league each year.
- **£15,000** would fund a feasibility study for a new National Goalball Centre.
- **£6,000** per year to fund a utility vehicle for transportation plus 7-seater SUV.
- **£5,000** to enable a Club to be established and to operate per year.
- **£2,500** for a set of goals.
- **£500** to develop a qualified Club Head Coach.
- **£250** to develop a qualified Club Assistant Coach.
- **£50** for a ball.
- **£35** for a set of eye shades.
- **£25** for a set of pads (knee, elbow and hip).

To discuss how you may wish to partner with us please don't hesitate to get in touch:

Mark Winder

(Secretary General/Chief Executive Officer)

Goalball UK

English Institute of Sport Sheffield, Coleridge Road, Sheffield, S9 5DA

Phone: 0114 2235670

Mobile: 07711 049565

Email: mark@goalballuk.com






Goalball UK
Transforming People's Lives
www.goalballuk.com