

PAUL WHEATLEY – Coaching Role of Honour Citation

From early on Paul was devoted to sport and selected to swim for Middlesex. His coaching roles began early too – he was a BCU canoe instructor by 18. In his twenties he devoted almost all his spare time to the Shanklin Youth Club, helping the youngsters engage in sports and adventure trips. After finding a handful of keen girl footballers there, he began coaching them. When their talent became obvious, Paul sought to take them a step further and contacted Lawrie McMenemy Southampton FC's manager, asking his advice. Lawrie put Paul in contact with Sue Lopez who had developed Southampton Women's FC and was the first English woman to play full time for Roma in 1971. It wasn't long before Paul was transporting the young football girls (at his own expense) across on the ferry from the Isle of Wight to give them a taste of the training required at the top level of women's football at the time. It was here he first met Heather Kirkland a Southampton player he would later reunite with more than 40 years later. (Heather is the current England O60's walking football manager and Paul her assistant manager). It was at the same training sessions in 1981 in Southampton that Paul first met his wife, Jacqui. It was a special occasion on 15th August 2021 when 40 years later, they played against one another in the first ever Inter-Gender International Walking Football matches at St Georges Park.

Along the way, when Jacqui was playing County hockey, Paul also trained to become a hockey umpire, taking charge of many Winchester Ladies matches. After his two daughters came along, it wasn't long before the whole family was involved in football in Winchester, and Paul was coaching the Winchester girls' team. In spite of his coaching, family commitments, and the demands of a full-on career in Procurement, Paul still found time to develop his golf handicap.

The moment Paul relocated to Guernsey from Winchester in Nov 2005 he offered his football coaching skills to the GFA. They placed him with Rangers where he started offering regular football for girls. He supported Rangers for many years also coaching their Minis. Paul was also a coach for Guernsey Girls Island Academy, at a time when the girl's football was struggling to survive. He worked tirelessly over several years to both keep the existing players and develop the underage players until they were old enough to join the squad.

Whilst working in Procurement for the Government, he formed Government United a team for more veteran players and managed their squad in fixtures which included the then and also current Chief Minister. (I know Paul had some interesting conversations with the players as to whether he was brave enough to substitute the Minister! He would also 'police' Sir Charles Frossard House to ensure not his squad were using the stairs in preference to the lift.)

In 2014 Paul was one of the pioneers bringing Walking Football to the Island. This resulted in the formation of Guernsey Walking Football Club, an all-inclusive platform for adults. The membership of this grew gradually attracting a wide variety of individuals of all abilities and ages (20's-80's). He was particularly proud that family members of different genders and generations could play a healthy, fun and competitive sport together. Never being satisfied, Paul worked hard to grow and diversify the club. By now he was personally washing the bibs 4-5 times a week, and always looking to raise funds, and organise matches. A lunchtime session for those players needing a slower pace or recovering from injury was established. Participants with Parkinsons disease were welcomed and groups from local care homes invited. Within the sessions all individuals were catered for even some requiring their carers to assist, and extra coaches were recruited.

To develop the main stream players, links were made with the England Walking Football Association and he arranged for visiting men's and ladies squads to provide local players with a valuable and

competitive experience. Not daunted by the pandemic restrictions, he researched how he could safely resume football coaching at the earliest point and amid many pots of hand sanitiser and social distancing he began with one-2-one coaching. His ongoing hard work was recognised by the England WFA and in 2021 he was awarded one of their prestigious Grass Roots Coaching awards for his work in Guernsey.

In 2023 one team entering the first ever World Nations Walking Football tournament needed a coach. Paul was asked by the England WFA, as Guernsey weren't able to send a team if he could help. Perhaps not surprisingly, he jumped at the chance, then asked who the team were. He took the new challenge seriously managing and coaching Rwanda's over 50's men's team. They were sent training videos to practice in Africa, and he arranged friendly UK matches as a warm up before the tournament. They were very impressed by his commitment presenting him with a beautiful painting of Rwandan wildlife.

Maybe the cause he holds most dearly, is the development nearly a decade ago of the 'Guernsey Mobility Let's Go' group (formerly Wheelchair Bouncers). He recognised early on that he didn't want it to be confined to wheelchair users, and that the emphasis should be on mobility and not disability. Securing venues, funding, equipment and coaches he provided a weekly opportunity for individuals to meet for sports and games. Again, not satisfied he further introduced year 5 children from St. Martins school as mini coaches. After around 7 years he has been responsible for introducing hundreds of local children to this experience. It proved so popular that it is now part of the school's curriculum and was noted in their inspection. Annually the whole school year is invited to participate in a Mini Olympics event involving huge organisation involving the school, his fellow coach and organiser Sue Dupont, additional coaches, media, and the Sports Commission. Next month a special live-streamed event is planned concurrently with Jersey where both islands will be able to compete and see each other on the screens without either team having to travel.

When first diagnosed with a serious health condition in 2019, his response was to train for the 'People's Race' a stage of Australia's Tour Down Under (their equivalent of the Tour de France) which he successfully completed. Always thinking of others first, many of the recipients of his coaching and organisational skills would have been unaware that for many months he continued all his coaching activities whilst receiving ongoing treatment.

Now 77, in Paul's remaining spare time he travels (at his own expense) as assistant coach to the England Women's O60's Walking Football squad this year travelling to Cyprus.

To keep his skills up to date, he has played both walking and running football for England in the O70 and O75's teams. He has been selected to play in Gibraltar next month for the England O75's walking football squad.