



On the pitch: Andy Francis trains a team on the sports courts at the Archer Academy in East Finchley.

# Years in the making: the glory of the women's game

By David Gritten

It was by far this summer's most remarkable sporting moment: the Lionesses, England's women's football team, joyously triumphing 2-1 over their German rivals at Wembley to become European champions, thereby boosting the women's game in front of millions of viewers across the country.

Women's football is sporting, joyous and exciting. It seemed to emerge suddenly from nowhere recently but in truth it has been popular, if somewhat under the radar, for at least a decade.

In East Finchley, resident Andy Francis had already made a name for himself by coaching all-girl football teams in local schools. "I started coaching back in 2013," he says, "and I first became involved with women's football in 2014. It definitely seemed unusual back then."

### Team building with fives and sevens

Andy started out at the Archer Academy, where he knew a few governors: "We had this wonderful 3-G (artificial grass) pitch, and we started with about a dozen players, mainly mums who hadn't played before." Having realised that mixed-gender squads did not allow young girls to shine and fulfil their potential, he set up all-girl teams: "Now we have something like 80 women a week playing."

His teams get to enhance their skills on a weekly basis on one of three midweek days: Mondays for advanced players, Tuesdays for intermediates and Fridays for beginners.

"We've played seven-a-side competitively for a few years, says Andy, "and now I've found a league for our five-

a-side beginner teams. That way they can get some experience of playing five-a-side football competitively, which really does make a difference."

### Joyous and friendly

Like so many football fans, he was enthralled by watching the triumph of the Lionesses at



Coach: Andy Francis. Photos Mike Coles

Wembley. For him, that final vindicated his feelings about the women's game: "It was joyous and everything you want football to be." He was also impressed by the friendly atmosphere among spectators:

"Seeing German and English people in the crowd together, that was just wonderful."

It would seem that things are getting even better. As Andy points out, his team have just begun their first-ever season in the Greater London Women's League, a competition for 11-a-side teams. Their opening match was due to be played on Sunday 4 September. Who's to say East Finchley won't become synonymous with first-class women's football?

## Tea is served

Age UK Barnet is holding a traditional afternoon tea on Thursday 6 October, serving sandwiches, cakes and scones with all the tea you can drink, all for £5 a person. "There'll be live music from members of Barnet Youth Orchestra, too," says chief executive Helen Newman. "A lovely opportunity to get together with friends and family, or come on your own and meet other people."

The tea will be hosted at the Ann Owens Centre, Oak Lane, East Finchley N2 8LT and one-hour slots are available from 2-3pm or 3pm-4pm. To book your place, contact Teresa on 07502 989 403 or email [Teresa.gallagher@ageukbarnet.org.uk](mailto:Teresa.gallagher@ageukbarnet.org.uk)

# A groundbreaking moment for sport

Manisha Taylor MBE, who grew up in Finchley, is assistant head of coaching at Queen's Park Rangers and is the only South Asian woman in such a role in the English professional game. Here, she gives her reaction to the victory of the Lionesses at the UEFA Women's Euros 2022 in July.

The Lionesses lifting the Euros 2022 trophy will go down in history as a monumental achievement not just for women's football, but for sport in our nation and around the world. It really is groundbreaking and something that will not be forgotten.

off the pitch and I am certain that the success of the England Team will aid this further.

### Role models

Manisha has just published **Dream Like Me: South Asian Football Trailblazers** profiling 42 pioneering individuals working in all parts of the game,



Skills: Coach Manisha Taylor says young female players should be inspired by the success of the Lionesses in the Euros.

As a young football-loving girl who grew up in the 1980s, the sport was not seen to be for girls and certainly not a South Asian Indian girl like me. Opportunities were limited and the visibility of the amazing women involved in the game at the time was not as we see it now.

I didn't have a pathway in the game as a player; however, thanks to the success of the Euros tournament young girls all over the world can now dream and believe that it is possible to have a career as a female professional footballer.

The game is continuing to inspire those from all communities and backgrounds, with the support of organisations that do brilliant work day in day out to ensure that football is accessible to all.

For me personally, it is fantastic to see so many more South Asian girls and women involved in football both on and

from male and female players to coaches, referees, board members, administrators, sports scientists and medical staff. She says: "Young people need to see people like them in order to believe that goals are possible: the role models in this book will show South Asian children and teens that their football dreams can come true." Find out more at [www.hoperoadpublishing.com](http://www.hoperoadpublishing.com).



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