

North Muskham *capturing memories*

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Theresa Bennett

A trailblazer in the development of women's football in Britain.

When I first arrived fresh from college at Muskham School in September 1974, one of my first priorities was to take responsibility for the school football team from Ray Bolus, the parent who had been in charge the previous year. The facilities in those days were rather basic, with just a few footballs and two sets of shirts which had seen better days. I decided to run a first team and a second team so that as many as possible would have the opportunity to play.

A couple of years later I was asked by one of the girls if she could play football instead of netball during the weekly games lessons and, in an early blow for equality, I agreed!! The young lady in question was Teresa Bennett and to the surprise of some of the boys she proved to be more than equal to the challenge. As I always tried to pick the teams on merit I saw no reason why she shouldn't play in one of the school teams, which she duly did; I do recall clearing it with the other schools she played against. She certainly had footballing ability with good dribbling skills and strong in the tackle.

As the team reached the final year at Muskham and with little opportunity to play at secondary school, the idea was put forward to form a team to play in the Newark Youth League on Saturday afternoons. A field was made available by Mr Bob Beard and, under the guidance of Trevor Frecknall, Glyn Jones, Charlie Richards and several other parents, two sides were entered at Under 12 and Under 14 level under the title "Muskham United". The first sides were made up purely of Muskham School pupils and included Teresa. At first all was OK and the registration was accepted by the league.

However, two days before the first match, it was decided that she wouldn't be allowed to play as mixed teams were not allowed.



The Ground Breaking Team of 76-77!!

Trevor publicised the story in the Nottingham Evening Post, and to coin a modern term "it went viral". The story appeared in the national press and also featured on the BBC's John Craven's Newsround. Reporter Lucy Mathen and a cameraman arrived to film in the village. Goalkeeper Chris Richards remembers being picked up at teatime and taken to the football field with other members of the team to be filmed, Teresa being featured scoring a goal. Brian Mayfield and Steven Hollingworth were interviewed. Chris also remembers watching the item on TV in the school hall on the following evening.

The story then took another turn as the decision to ban Teresa from playing resulted in legal action against the Football Association, the hearing being held in Newark Town Hall. Initially the case was won, but six weeks later the judgment was overturned on appeal. The ban was not finally lifted until 1991, when the FA belatedly took steps to promote girls football.

The case is quoted in many books on women's soccer. Teresa was certainly a trailblazer in the development of women's football in Britain.

Richard Lane (with thanks to Chris Richards)

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