

Women's Euros Oral History Transcript
Lesley Wilson

00:00:00

I came to Milton Keynes to work and I came as Director of Coaching - Swimming Coaching for City of Milton Keynes Swimming Club.

And when was that?

1984.

So you have been involved in the Equal Opportunities Programme and that was in the early nineties. Could you tell us some background and something about that please?

Yes in 1990 I came to work for Milton Keynes Council part of the team called Action Sport and that was really about increasing participation for people who wouldn't normally participate in sport and physical activity and part of that programme was to look at Equal Opportunities. One of the initiatives that we spent a fair some time looking at was Football and we looked at opportunities and access to Football for in particular Girls and Women. We contacted a number of schools across the Borough at the time it was the Borough of Milton Keynes then to see if schools would be interested in working with the Council to do some promotion of Football for Girls. We were surprised that even though the Council had got some money to invest in the scheme that there was little uptake from Schools, however, through word of mouth a number of Girls applied to the scheme and we set off and we started to organise Football for Girls at Woughton on The Green was one of the main venues and out of that initiative what happened word spread and by the end of the programme 1991 we had got something like one hundred Girls participating in the programme. It was very exciting and the problem with it was the Girls were learning Football skills and having Coaches but they didn't have any where to play and so we decided that we would introduce a small Tournament. It was really, really exciting and the Girls were so thrilled to be playing and have the opportunity to play in a Tournament. We set up a course for six weeks and the Coach who was a Woman called Lyn Callion who really was the driving force behind this full of motivation and enthusiasm for the sport suggested that all the Girls should have kit and set about trying to find some kit for

all the Girls. We had six teams they all had different coloured kit, they gave them some names which mainly increased excitement, I think I can remember some of them were Banana Stripes or I think there was MK Tops something like that and all the Girls joined and then trained as a team until the start of the Tournament. Then the Tournament started I have to say as it went on we had to have some rules and regulations on the side lines because people really got rather excited about it. The parents stepped in and became Team Managers for the Teams and then as the next I suppose that over the Summer all the Girls played and we had a Champion Team at the end and I can't remember which one it was that won but there are some photographs and you will be able to see a photograph of the winning team.

That's lovely and was this connected to like a wider fitness amongst Women and Girls?

Yes, Action Sport was really about trying to increase participation. We worked with different groups some would be for over fifty, Women and Girls and I did an initiative with Asian Women which was another driver and some of it was about Equal Opportunities which really is where the Football for Girls came out of. But it was literally all sorts of courses trying to involve people who would not participate in sport and physical activity to encourage them to use some of the Council's facilities and that could have been ranging from Golf, Tennis or Swimming or in some cases just getting people who had never taken part at all to actually take part in some sort of physical activity, trying to remove some of the barriers for Women which had been about child care so we would have put a free Creche on so that Women could actually participate in an activity and have their children looked after and the other thing that we did was we would make female only

00:05:00

sessions which obviously was really positive back in the nineties so that Women who had barriers to participation and it might have been about, you know, single gender opportunity we provided that too. Badminton at the Drill Hall for example at Wolverton was a very successful opportunity for people who wanted to participate.

So great schemes there so have you ever played Football yourself?

No (laughs).

So you have never played Football?

I have never played Football it is not a particular interest of mine.

So what are your sports?

My main interest is Swimming I came to Milton Keynes as Director of Coaching in the Swimming and that is my first love and can I stop?.

Yeah?

I am going to be really political now 'cause we need a new swimming pool can I say it?.

Yes just say it?

Okay so Swimming is my main, my passion is the sport that I came to Milton Keynes to work as the Director of Sport for the City of Milton Keynes Swimming Club and when I first came I came from Coventry where we have a 50 metres swimming pool in the seventies. When I got here in 1984 we didn't have anything like that and unfortunately forty years on we still do not have a 50 metre swimming pool in Milton Keynes and if there is anything I can do before I retire it would be to encourage the Council to have a 50 metre swimming pool forty years on 2024 it would be fantastic if we could have a 50 metre swimming pool. Particularly on the back of COVID it has had a major impact on the number of children that can swim so that whole group of children that didn't learn to swim during COVID now need to learn to swim, those that started to swim have not much improved because they couldn't have access to the pool so they are not moving up so there is an absolute backlog of children needing to learn to swim and it is a life skill and I think we need to provide children with the opportunity to learn to swim.

I think so I think we should forward this for on to the powers that be?

Yeah.

So did you hear anymore about the people that played in the olden days when you were Director in the nineties. Did you hear anymore did any of them go on to do Football more professionally or?

No what happened at the end of this Tournament when all the Girls had finished playing there was a little presentation with the Mayor. But Lyn Callion who was obviously a driving force behind this she really was passionate about Women's Football. She I think they moved to Wolverton where there was there was an old cycling velodrome there back in the nineties and the Women's Football Club started they set themselves up there just

I think it was around the end of 1991 or 1992. So that they could continue to operate as Girls Football and Women's Football what happened after that I don't know I changed jobs and went to do something else and obviously have not been involved in Football at all until now I am back at the Council and we have got the very, very, exciting opportunity of the Women's Euros coming to Milton Keynes hence everybody was talking about the Women's Euros and I thought "I wonder what happened to all those girls in 1991 that played Football I wonder if they are playing Football still or whether their Girls are playing Football" and it would be really nice to find out if they were.

Actually that sounded like a nice ending?

Yeah.

I was going to talk about whether you are going to the Euros are you going to go to some of the matches but I don't whether we need to?

I am actually going to go to the matches, I am volunteering.

So tell us about what you are doing during the Euros, the Women's Euros?

The Women's Euros is really exciting for Milton Keynes and colleagues have been working hard with the FA to put the event on and I am sorry.....

Start again don't worry it's fine. ??????????? you are better than most.

Okay so the Women's Euros?

So the Women's Euros is a really exciting time for Milton Keynes and I will be along with colleagues from Milton Keynes Council volunteering to work at the event. We will be working on the Fan Zone and doing the marches and just almost like being Game Makers helping people to enjoy the experience of being part of the Euros in Milton Keynes.

That's lovely and are you going to be watching the matches from where you are or what are your plans there?

I am not sure whether I will manage to watch any of the matches because some of my duties I think are car park duties and information booths but there is one evening where I will be at the MK Stadium so hopefully I will be able to see some of the Football then.

And what is the buzz around the sort of the Council are they excited?

Yes absolutely but I work in the Leisure Department so we are bound to be it is really exciting for us and also the fact that we have just got City status so at the moment it is a really good time to be in Milton Keynes and lots of initiative for sport and physical activity so I would say that we are really excited about it coming to Milton Keynes.

Yes, Is there anything else that you can think of?

Yes that is lovely, perfect.

(laughs)

00:10:42

Tape ends.