

The Army Volleyball Association - The beginning

During the early 1970's as an Army Recruiter Sgt Gordon Neale 3RGJ was playing for a national league volleyball team in Essex and hit upon the idea of forming a recognised Army team.

He advertised through the Soldier magazine and regimental media trying to find anyone that was playing at a reasonable level.

The first unofficial team entered the " En Tout Cas " games (now Crown Services) in 1976 at Kirkham Prison Lancashire. Neale cajoled his CO Chris Dunphie to become the first President and set about getting the sport recognised by the Army Sports Control Board.

Over the next few years a squad was formed and started to play on a regular basis in competitions and leagues throughout the country and abroad with mixed success. During this time he ran courses for coaches and referees mainly at the APTC centre in Aldershot.

It took two long years and in 1978 the Army Sports Control Board finally sanctioned volleyball as an official sport albeit initially under the wing of basketball.

It wasn't long before it was decided to start a women's team as well and Neale went on to coach both teams. Even at one time coaching the now Dame Kelly Holmes when she was at the School of PT.

Neale left the Army in 1986 still coaching at the time although it was the Great Britain Men's Sitting Volleyball team. He went on to become the CEO of Disability Sport England and was awarded an OBE in 2002 for his outstanding contribution to disabled sport. He was also the first International referee for disabled volleyball in this country and went on to become the Vice President of the world organisation.

In 2012 Gordon was nominated by Volleyball England to carry the Olympic Torch and was also volleyball commentator at the Paralympics.

He has also been awarded the Peter Wardale Trophy for outstanding achievement to Volleyball England and in 2022 was made an Honorary Life Member of World ParaVolley for his contribution over 39 years as a coach, tutor, referee and Technical Official.

In 2024 inducted in the Don Anthony MBE Volleyball England Hall of Fame.

