**Netball is in the Olympics!**

Okay, the actual physical game isn’t (yet!) but everything else the sport encompasses is…

Netball is traditionally seen as a Commonwealth sport but participation is growing significantly worldwide and in particular in Europe, where it is the International Federation of Netball Associations’ ([IFNA’s](http://www.netball.org/)) leading development region.

Perhaps the biggest contribution netball offers to the Olympics is to its legacy. David Cameron may want a 'Big Society' and the Olympics may want to increase participation and volunteering levels but neither have discussed following netball’s example. And they should…after all; it’s the one non-Olympic sport still making the headlines, even during Olympic fever.

Why so?

Well, netball has focused its efforts on developing people through volunteering and increasing participation and performance.

Firstly, this approach is directly benefitting the Olympics because a number of people from the netball community have senior roles in East London with the East Midlands Netball Region being particularly well represented. For example, Leicestershire’s Sara Bostock (TFC Netball Club), who is in charge of the music at the synchronised swimming has volunteered in netball in a number of capacities including officiating and being part of the [East Midlands Netball Youth Action Group](http://www.eastmidlandsnetball.co.uk/youth-section.html), while Jo Emmett, the Franchise Manager of the East Midlands Netball Superleague team, [Loughborough Lightning](http://www.loughboroughlightning.co.uk/), is playing host to a number of senior IOC delegates at the Games. Leicestershire is also well represented with Laura Thurlow (Knighton NC), who is a Transport Team Games Maker at the North Greenwich Arena. Nottinghamshire’s Carol Hallam (Huthwaite NC) is working at the Paralympic Games Wheelchair Rugby, while Dani Gatt ([Nottingham Knights NC](http://www.nknc.co.uk/)), who recently featured on [BBC Radio Nottingham](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio/player/bbc_radio_nottingham) and in the [Nottingham Post](http://www.thisisnottingham.co.uk/Olympic-medic-s-volunteer-job-dream-live/story-16584159-detail/story.html) is also part of an exclusive volunteering team in charge of treating elite Olympic athletes with their necessary physio requirements. Dani insists that volunteering in netball has given so much back to her – a running theme within the netball volunteering community – including gaining the necessary skills to land such a key position. In this sense it is clear to see that netball is directly helping to deliver a successful Games.

Secondly, and probably most importantly, the netball community is helping make a post-2012 sporting legacy within its own sport. This may seem a little unusual given that netball is not a sport which is featuring at the Olympics but it is historical setbacks like these which have actually helped grow the game.

Without any payment and often juggling work commitments, the army of netballing volunteers has helped England Netball make this non-Olympic game one of the few sports that has actually increased participation over the last few years, when many of the other main sports (including those in the Olympics) have seen their participation rates fall.

Netball volunteers are regarded so highly by the London Olympic organisers because of what they do every day of the netball season. The sport relies heavily on volunteers from coaching and officiating to recognition and profile. Like in the Olympics, volunteers are the lifeblood of netball.

Of course, it helps when England Netball introduce innovative initiatives such as [Back to Netball](http://www.englandnetball.co.uk/my-game/back-to-netball/). This scheme helps attract new and former participants over the age of 16 who have not played the sport in a while and need a gentle (re)introduction to netball in a fun and friendly environment. The introductory sessions are held at strategic times of the week allowing women to fit netball around their current busy lives and this therefore gives everybody an optimal chance of succeeding in the sport once more.

Other new and exciting variations of netball are aimed at the younger generation too. For example, [High 5](http://www.englandnetball.co.uk/my-game/High_5) encourages young people to rotate and play in all of the game’s five positions as well as learning about volunteering aspects of the sport, such as time keeping and scoring.

Netball continues to go from strength to strength both in the UK and worldwide and will be a major force in helping to achieve the Olympic Legacy.