

If Wendy doesn't inspire you to become a Sports Coach, nothing will

By Gina Rogers, Sports Development Officer, Active Sussex



If you've been living under a rock for a couple of months you might not have heard - so let me tell you a bit about Wendy Russell and why she's been nominated for not one, not two, but three prestigious awards.

We all have good days and bad days, I don't think I'd be out of line for saying Wendy Russell is having a very good day, make that a good month.

Here's 5 things you didn't know about Wendy Russell:

1. She won coach of the Year at the Sussex Sports Award in 2012
2. She was run over and told she couldn't play sport again when she was 11
3. She's a Project 500 ambassador
4. She's a Coach Support Officer for Active Sussex
5. She created hockey specific sign language for deaf players

She was shortlisted for the *Sunday Times* and Sky Sports Women of the Year Awards and is up for Disability Coach of the Year Award by sports coach UK, not to mention her Sportivate project is up for the Sussex Sports Awards.

Not bad for someone as humble as Wendy. *'I love watching people learn and grow in confidence through sport.'*

Her story might have been a very different one. Sport for Wendy was in her blood, but it didn't come easy. *'I played football at lunchtimes at primary school when I was 11, and when I got to secondary school they put me in goal for hockey as they didn't do girls football at that point. But then I got run over by a car, had some time out, then got told I had arthritis in my hip, and the doctors told me I wasn't allowed to play sport again.'*

Wendy now a Level 2 Coach in Hockey, Director of Coaching at Brighton and Hove Hockey Club and is a PE Teacher at Steyning Grammar School. I don't think she listened to the doctors when they told her she'd never be able to play sport again.

If you've not met Wendy, you might feel sorry for her rough start in life. I can tell you now - save your sympathy for the person that just got soaked standing too close to the puddle just as the bus was speeding past.

Nothing phases Wendy Russell, she took over the junior section of Brighton and Hove Hockey Club a few years ago, and since, the club has seen a huge increase in membership, spiking at over 300 juniors.

If that wasn't enough, she single handedly started the first deaf hockey club in Sussex - and if that still wasn't enough, she created hockey specific sign language from scratch. *'There is no sign language for hockey. If I needed to communicate with participants, I would have to think about other ways of doing so. It was difficult. There is no sign language, for example, for hockey stick or dribbling so what I had to do was create 40 new sign language signs that are now being used across the country. I'm really proud of that.'*

The sign language has been ratified by Remark! and is being rolled out by UK deaf sport, the National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) and England Hockey. Not bad for someone told never to play sport again as an early teen!

Clearly Wendy is a busy woman, so what I wanted to know was why she turns up multiple times a week and volunteers her time in the (soon to be) freezing cold?

'Each session I laugh and have a joke with whoever I am coaching, whether this is juniors, adults or deaf youngsters. No one training session is the same. When you see someone 'light up' when they can do the skills or drill you are doing there is no better feeling.'

She's not stopping there either, Wendy has plans to support other clubs who have deaf hockey players, and look to form more adult deaf hockey teams.

Completing her Level 3 Coaching award is on the cards and coaching abroad has also been banded around - the sky's the limit for Wendy. She radiates enthusiasm and she makes you wonder why you're not doing more coaching!

If you're hesitant at taking the first step into coaching, Wendy's advice is: *'Do it! There is so much support and advice out there now compared to when I was first qualified. Start with offering to support a coach in a sport you enjoy, then see which age groups and gender you would like to work with. They all bring something different, and as a coach you need different qualities to coach each group.'*

Now you know the woman behind the awards, but for Wendy the recognition is nice but it's not why she does it. When I asked her what she might be doing today if she wasn't coaching she said:

'I can't think of anyone I would want to do. Coaching is part of me, and I am part of it!'