

**Netball star's commitment to making the sport more inclusive nets prestigious award**



A rising star of netball has won an award for her efforts in making the sport more inclusive.

Ziana Butt, who was the first person of Pakistani heritage to represent England in netball, had already enjoyed a great start to 2023 after being awarded with the British Empire Medal for services to netball and diversity in the King's New Year Honours list.

And earlier this week Ziana, who is an England Netball Young Volunteer and Youth Sport Trust Forum representative, was named Volunteer of the Year at the London Sport Awards.

The annual awards, which are supported by the City of London Corporation, celebrate the outstanding work being done throughout the city to help people play sport and enjoy all the social, physical, and mental wellbeing benefits which regular activity provides.

The Volunteer of the Year category recognises the outstanding contribution of volunteers to grassroots physical activity and sport, highlighting the countless individuals who share their knowledge, passion and skills and give their time generously.

Ziana, who has also co-authored a book aimed at encouraging more children from South Asian backgrounds to take up sport, was praised by the expert judging panel for her work challenging stereotypes and encouraging wider and on-going conversations about diversity and inclusion within sport.

The talented 20-year-old from Ilford who has won 15 caps for the England under-21 netball team, is currently in the inaugural England mixed squad, and plays for Saracens Mavericks under-21s was hailed by the judges as a visible athletic role model who is actively inspiring future generations.

Ziana began volunteering at the age of just ten and as part of her National Youth Sport Trust Forum role now advises schools on their sport and recreational policies. She is also a qualified netball coach and runs regular community netball sessions and activities in schools.

Speaking about her passion for volunteering, she said: "I volunteer because I love it. I love seeing the kids have fun. That's the most important thing for me - seeing the kids have fun and knowing that what I'm doing is having an impact on them.

"I also think of me growing up - I didn't have any role models that I connected with. There weren't any female South Asian netball players for me to look up to and I think that was probably one of the biggest barriers.

"That's why I feel so strongly and why it's so important to me to be a visible role model for South Asian children. I want to be that role model, to inspire the next generation, and make sport more accessible.

Ziana hopes winning the Volunteer of the Year Award at the London Sport Awards will further help her on-going efforts to show people sport is for everyone.

She added: "I feel incredibly honoured to win – I felt incredibly honoured to even be in the final.

"There are so many amazing people out there who do so much incredible volunteering.

"The award isn't just for me – it is an opportunity to continue making sport more accessible, continue making it a more inclusive environment, and continue encouraging more South Asian youngsters to take up sport.

"I'm really proud of role that I play."