

12
Netball
Poems

By Mark Pirie

THE NIGHT PRESS

12 Netball Poems by Mark Pirie is a collection of poems celebrating the game of netball and its players. Included is a sequence of poems 'Five Silver Ferns Portraits' in honour of some of New Zealand's finest netball players.

An addenda by Napier poet, former scientist and politician Bill Sutton celebrates Irene van Dyk, a Silver Fern great.

About the author

Mark Pirie is a Wellington poet, sports fan and researcher. He has previously published poems on rugby, cricket and football, and edited *A Tingling Catch: A Century of New Zealand Cricket Poems 1864-2009* and a Brazil 2014 World Cup issue of his poetry journal *broadsheet: A Selection of Football Poetry 1890-2014*. Website: www.markpirie.com



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with an addenda by

Bill Sutton

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To my mum, who played and enjoyed the game

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D I A N A

Diana's game was netball.
She liked to balance and throw the ball.

Her favourite place was goal keep;
it helped that she was tall.

*'Diana' is from a sequence of children's poems I wrote, with each kid (named) playing a different sport.

W I N G A T T A C K

My netball days were long ago,
I sing of bibs and goals that flow.

When once I played Wing Attack
stretching Centre to her limits.

Jumping and striving for the ball,
an act of balance suiting the tall.

Being shorter, I struggled to catch
but was quicker, knew my limits.

Once, yes, I did play Wing Attack.
Now I cheer and follow the match!

*At Wadestown School I played for a mixed boys and girls team. I didn't get to shoot goals but I enjoyed attacking and passing balls through to the shooters. I played in inter-school matches. My sister also played netball for Wadestown.

FIVE SILVER FERNS PORTRAITS

SANDRA EDGE

Sandra Edge, you stole
my mother away
with each neat pass
after dinner.

I saw her sitting in
our kitchen watching
fingers crossed
as each test
counted down.

•

Sandra Edge, you stole
our minutes, our seconds,
watching you
catch or intercept, then throw
to the shooters.

I too joined mum in
our kitchen
heart in mouth
as final quarters
counted down.

•

Sandra Edge, you stole
spectators' hearts
with your play,
a legend of the mid court.

How many joined their
mums in kitchens/lounges
around the country
excited, nervous
as goals were made
and the seconds
counted down.

*I grew up watching Sandra Edge as a boy. She was the inspirational player to watch for many years, and the star presence that kept me initially hooked on netball. She was chosen at Centre in the New Zealand Dream Team in 1999.

A M A Z I N G G R A C E

Maria Tutaia's grace
is simply unstoppable.

An athlete
on the netball court,
distinguished by precision,
that sharp shooter's
flair.

I note her calm.
Even when
she rarely misses,
luck throws
her a rebound
and she makes good
the second chance.

And, if she had to
hit the bulls-eye
from 100 yards
my money'd
be on her.

*Maria Tutaia, Queen of the Longshot, soul destroyer of defenders,
often the most striking presence on the netball court in recent years
with beauty and charm to go with it.

CASEY KOPUA

Working with de Bruin
and Grant, and others,
organising defence is Kopua.

She gives it her all,
tall and strong, facing
formidable, agile opponents.

She falls and tumbles,
puts her body on the line
for team and country.

A Captain Courageous
of the netball court,
she's the Ferns' leader.

*Casey Kopua, a Richie McCaw-like captain in netball. She suffered a horrific injury in 2014 and came back strongly at the 2015 World Cup. Unlucky not to finish a winner.

L A U R A L A N G M A N

Who can forget *Langman style*?

She's always there: unmissable.

In the air, agility to the fore,
she throws and catches at pace,
timing and intercepting passes
to perfection.

I can't recall a recent game
finishing without her.
Over 100 consecutive tests.

In basketball,
they talk about the *American Dream*
...well, in netball,
she's the *New Zealand Dream*.

**Langman style* is also a dance taking off the well-known Gangnam style. The basketballer in question is former NBA pro Kareem, the American Dream.

L E I L A N I R E A D

Leilani, here you now rest.
I remember you, on court,
leaping with the ball
against opposing Diamonds.

At your funeral, painted silver ponga
fronds were placed on your coffin.
At the marae in Mana, teammates
bid you a tearful farewell.

That was 1999, but how the years fly.
We don't now what will happen to us,
some race with the stars and shine on.
Yet you rest, ever so brightly.

At Whenua Tapu, flowers are
placed by family and friends,
to know you are loved.
I think of when the ball sang in your hands.

*Read died after a stroke in 1999 aged 25 and was due to play for Samoa that year. 'You've Got a Friend' was sung at Leilani's farewell by her teammates. Porirua's Read played for the Silver Ferns in 1992 and 1993, represented Samoa at the 1995 world championships, and was reselected for New Zealand in 1996. This poem was written in 2014 after returning from the Whenua Tapu cemetery, where Read is buried near my mum's grave.

NEW QUEENS OF NETBALL

Swift passing,
high catching,
nimble playing.

That's Malawi:
Queens, that is,
of the court.

Netball just
got itself
a potential giant killer.

Jamaicans look on,
smile and disbelieve
as Malawi (twice)

take the lead.

*New Zealand 50, Malawi 47, 2014 Commonwealth Games, Glasgow.
An exciting match, if only for the continued advance of the Malawi team over the past decade. I am one of those who believes in the development of world netball. As we've seen with Bangladesh making the 2015 World Cup quarter-finals in cricket, it's nice to see some depth entering world netball.

NETBALL WORLD CUP 2015

Sixteen nations are lit
like candles on a cake.
Each one plays for glory
paving the way for a story
of success as Champs
by raising a Cup high.

Our girls are Silver Ferns,
Australians: Diamonds,
Malawi girls are Queens,
Jamaicans: Sunshine girls.
England, Wales, Scotland
come to play, too, and

the lesser lights of Singapore
and Sri Lanka. Pacific
hopes rest with Fiji, Samoa.
Caribbean: Barbados, Trinidad.
Uganda, South Africa, Zambia
make up the rest from Africa.

Sixteen nations are lit
like candles on a cake,
but only one will be Champ
of the net, the rest are
making up the full story
of world netball glory.

SWEET VICTORY

Back from the wilds of skid row;
Ferns sporting that golden glow.

*Written after New Zealand's first win over Australia in 9 matches at the 2015 World Cup. Sure, they lost the final but the Ferns fought hard and earned respect. Credit to coach Wai Taumaunu for going on her nerve and putting together an exciting mix of established and new talent.

MOON NETBALL

(sometime in the future...)

At quarter time
they stop for air

players are floating
with no breathing space

the hoop is a long shot
for broke players.

New astro skirt suits
grip to players

allowing moon flexibility.
Who dares wins.

The game restarts,
girls leap, catch, twist.

Upside down, they pass
balls under silver boots.

NETBALL HAIKU

ball rebounds
– at full stretch
Goal Shoot

falling over
pushed from the ball
– frustrated look

ball lobbed
into space
– player leaps to intercept

cheeky bounce pass
through the legs of
Goal Defence

lighting the stadium
– coaches' glow
as whistle sounds

A D D E N D A

Putting together this small collection, I had wanted to write a poem on Irene van Dyk, but another poet had beaten me to it. I thought I'd include this at the end.

An open letter, 'In praise of Irene van Dyk', published in *The Wellingtonian* newspaper, edited by sports writer Joseph Romanos, 8 November 2012:

Dear Editor

I enjoyed seeing Mark Pirie's poem about Maria Tutaia (November 1). I've often wondered why our top netballers don't seem to get as much attention as our top rugby players. I believe we should celebrate both.

With that in mind I've written a poem about Irene van Dyk, who also deserves a tribute. What a player she is.

I R E N E

*If Richie is our greatest rugby player,
Irene must be our finest netballer!
The legs of a Greek goddess-athlete,
breasts of Aphrodite, face fully worthy
of a portrait by John Singer Sargent;
with these classic graces allied to the
skills of a demon and grim determination.
No need for irony here, Irene
has been a gift to players, spectators,
umpires alike, and surely we were
lucky people when she settled here.*

Bill Sutton, Napier