



## **Middlesbrough Visually impaired tennis player Rosie Pybus delighted by Women of the Future Awards recognition**

Middlesbrough's Great Britain visually impaired tennis player Rosie Pybus says she is delighted to have been lauded with 'highly commended' status in the 2020 Women of the Future Awards Sports in recognition of her contribution to her sport and her work as an advocate for visually impaired young people and families.

Pybus, a member of the Great Britain Visually Impaired Tennis Team managed by the LTA, was one of five women named on the shortlist for the Sport category for this year's virtual awards ceremony.

After Great Britain rower Imogen Grant was named winner of the Sport award, the panel of judges announced Pybus as 'highly commended' out of the remaining four shortlisted finalists. The 29-year-old said:

*"Just to be sat in a virtual room with that many talented and passionate women, I can't put into words what that means to me and it was great to be a part of it all. I was just delighted, as it's great exposure for tennis, but for VI tennis, in particular. There were people on those shortlists who are surgeons, astrophysicists and so on and the fact that VI tennis got included in that kind of forum, was just brilliant."*

Pybus, a multiple national and international medallist, has continued to champion blind and visually impaired tennis during the Covid-19 pandemic, alongside her work as Children, Young People and Families Support Officer for the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) in Scotland.

Nominated for the awards by LTA Workforce Development Partner Jo Cunliffe and Participation Development Partner Tanya Woodward, Pybus added:

*"It's really humbling to know, first of all, that I would be considered to be nominated. I've not been trying to drive anything; I've just been trying to keep people's spirits up and in doing so that keeps my spirits up. So, by doing things like organising a Zoom every Sunday for the VI community, setting some lockdown challenges for other VI tennis player and pushing opportunities for keeping active, it helps us all.*

*"They gave a mention to the work I do with RNIB, too, which is very similar in that I'm working with children, young people and families who are blind and partially sighted."*

While playing opportunities during the last year have been restricted to the odd training session at Tennis World in Middlesbrough, Pybus and her fellow members of the Great Britain Blind and Visually Impaired Tennis Squad have also twice had their world championships cancelled.

A gold and silver medallist at the last two annual International Blind Tennis Tournaments and a prolific medallist at the LTA's National Visually Impaired Tennis Championships and National Series tournaments, she was one of several Great Britain players who were hoping to contest the 2020 international event in Italy. While, that tournament was cancelled and rescheduled for June this year, it has now been cancelled again. Pybus said:

*"It's is absolutely the right decision. A lot of visually impaired players have additional health conditions and the nature of being visually impaired means that that often entails close contact with guides and that kind of thing.*

*"The last time I was able to play was 3 January, just before we went into this lockdown. Libby Fletcher at Tennis World had been out with some of the team of volunteers shovelling snow off the courts, so the likes of myself could play and it was just great to be able to be out and hitting a ball then.*

*"But now we have the Zoom calls to look forward to and gives us a bit of structure, I'm lucky enough that I've got enough room to swing my racket in my home.*

*"I do feel very grateful for the brilliant friends I've made through tennis. If I'd not met (fellow player) Wendy Gasper and if I hadn't met Jo Cunliffe, then I'd never have engaged in tennis, as I was never much of a sporty person previously.*

Pybus, who dedicates part of her week to be a volunteer telephone befriender for Age UK, added.

*"I wouldn't be exaggerating to say that most of my life is lived in a tennis bubble of some sort, be it through friends or through actually playing the sport and then having the opportunity to get on the employment and housing ladder. There's so many great people in the sport and so many things that the sport has helped me to achieve. Last year we did the 2.6 Challenge and in December we did a 24-hour challenge in aid of the Dan Maskell Tennis Trust, which helps to facilitate disabled people to take up and enjoy the benefits of tennis."*

The LTA supports and promotes visually impaired tennis in Great Britain as part of its wider disability work. Outside of Covid-19 restrictions, this includes delivering regular weekly and monthly sessions as part of the LTA's disability Open Court programme, subsidising camps to help players develop their skills and running a series of regional and national tournaments for blind and partially sighted players of all abilities.

The Women of the Future Awards was founded by culinary expert, author and motivational speaker Pinky Lilani CBE DL in 2006, as part of a network of events and forums to celebrate female talent and champion the contribution of women in all aspects of society in the UK.

To find out more about the LTA's work with disability tennis, head to [www.lta.org.uk/play](http://www.lta.org.uk/play) or email [disabilitytennis@lta.org.uk](mailto:disabilitytennis@lta.org.uk).