

= Helen Rollason =

Helen Frances Rollason MBE (née Grindley : 11 March 1956 ? 9 August 1999) was a British sports journalist and television presenter , who in 1990 became the first female presenter of the BBC 's sports programme Grandstand . She was also a regular presenter of Sport on Friday , and of the children 's programme Newsround during the 1980s .

Born in London , Rollason studied to become a PE teacher before entering radio broadcasting in 1980 . After directing sport related content for Channel 4 , where she helped to bring American football to British television , she anchored coverage of the 1987 World Student Games and 1988 Summer Olympics . Her work on Grandstand proved popular with viewers , and led to a number of other sports presenting roles for Rollason throughout the 1990s . As well as covering mainstream events such as the 1996 Summer Olympics , she became a champion of disability sports , helping to raise its profile and change its public and media perception . She presented sports bulletins for BBC Breakfast News and BBC News , and in 1996 was named as Sports Presenter of the Year .

Rollason was diagnosed with colon cancer in 1997 , and fought a two @-@ year battle with the disease . A 1998 documentary , Hope for Helen , followed her treatment , and won her much public support for her courage . She continued to work throughout her illness , and shortly before her death was awarded an MBE in the 1999 Birthday Honours . Later that year , the BBC established an award in her memory which is presented at the annual Sports Personality of the Year awards ceremony . A cancer charity was also founded in her name . Rollason 's television career also helped to open up the way for other women to enter the world of sports broadcasting , with presenters such as Sue Barker and Gabby Yorath following in her footsteps .

= = Early life = =

Helen Grindley was born in London on 11 March 1956 , and adopted at the age of nine months . Raised in a family where she was the second of three children , she spent her childhood in Northamptonshire and Bath . Her father was an engineer who later became a lecturer at Bath College , and her mother a biology teacher . She attended the Bath High School for Girls , and after developing an early interest in sport , was a member of Bath Athletics Club , as well as playing hockey for Somerset . Although she was keen to follow a career in broadcasting , careers advisors at school steered her towards teaching instead .

After leaving school she studied at the University of Brighton 's Chelsea College of Physical Education in Eastbourne , where she became Vice @-@ President of the Students Union . During her second year at the college she spent a term as an exchange student at Dalhousie University in Halifax , Nova Scotia . She graduated in 1977 . After completing her studies she became a PE teacher , and spent three years teaching the subject to secondary school students . She worked initially at Henry Beaufort School in Winchester , Hampshire , before moving to Essex , where she was a supply teacher . It was while she was teaching PE that she met her future husband , a fellow teacher named John Rollason . The couple were married in 1980 . Their daughter , Nikki , was born in 1983 . The couple divorced in 1991 .

= = Broadcasting career = =

Rollason continued to aspire to a career in broadcasting , and while still teaching did screen tests for BBC Wales and BBC South , but she was unsuccessful in both auditions . In 1980 , she took a holiday job as a volunteer presenter at Basildon Community Radio after seeing an advertisement in Basildon town centre and offering her services to them . A year later she joined the team of Essex Radio as a sports reporter when the commercial station went on air . She was subsequently appointed as the station 's deputy sports editor . Three years later she became a producer @-@ director for Cheerleader Productions , making sports content for Channel 4 . Among the events for which she helped to provide coverage were the final of the 1984 Davis Cup , held in Sweden , and Super Bowl XIX , which took place in 1985 . Additionally , she worked on the US Masters and US

Open .

After just over a year with Cheerleader , Rollason left the company to concentrate on her broadcasting career , and became a freelance reporter . She covered the 1987 World Student Games from Zagreb for Thames Television , and then presented the 1988 World Junior Athletics championships from Sudbury , Ontario for Channel 4 . Later on in 1988 , she provided coverage of that year 's Summer Olympics , held in Seoul , for ITV . During the mid @-@ 1980s , she also joined the presenting team of the BBC children 's news programme , Newsround , with a view to increasing its sports coverage , and presented several features on topics such as gymnastics and female jockeys , as well as presenting Newsround Extra , a show that covered a specific issue in more detail . One such programme was a report on the street children of Bogotá , a subject that deeply moved her and reduced her to tears on screen .

In 1990 , Rollason joined BBC Sport and became the first female presenter of Grandstand , where her down @-@ to @-@ earth presenting style quickly made her popular with viewers , and earned her a regular presenting role on BBC Two 's Sport on Friday , as well as a raft of other sporting programmes . Among her credits with the BBC are coverage of the Wimbledon Championships , the 1992 Summer Olympics from Barcelona and 1996 Summer Olympics from Atlanta , together with the 1994 Commonwealth Games , which were held in Victoria , British Columbia . She was an advocate of disability sports , and helped to alter its public and media perception with her coverage of the 1996 Summer Paralympics . Britain 's Olympic team had been fairly unsuccessful at that year 's Olympics , prompting Rollason to urge viewers and the media to support what she called the " real " Olympics . Jane Swan , General Secretary of the British Paralympic Association later described how Rollason 's support for the event had helped to change its image . " Until then , the Paralympics had been treated as documentary material , focusing mainly on disability . Helen made people realise that it was sport . " Other disability sporting events she covered include the 1990 World Disabled Championships , 1991 Blind Golfers ' Championships , and the 1992 Summer Paralympics . She also fronted sports bulletins for BBC Breakfast News . In 1996 , she was named as the Television and Radio Industries Sports Presenter of the Year .

= = Later career , illness and death = =

Rollason began feeling unwell in 1996 during an eight @-@ week assignment to the US , where she was covering that year 's Olympic and Paralympic Games . She was diagnosed with cancer of the colon in August 1997 , which she was told had also spread to her liver . She was initially given three months to live , but confounded medical opinion by fighting the disease long after that . She underwent treatment with chemotherapy , but also used a combination of holistic therapies and diet to treat her condition . The cancer later metastasised to her lungs . Rollason continued to work throughout her illness , despite sessions of chemotherapy that left her feeling weak , and cited her work as the thing that had kept her going throughout her treatment . " I stay working because I love it , and because I feel best on the days when I 'm busy . I 'd far rather work than hang around the house ? even though there are days when I can hardly get out of bed . " She presented sports bulletins for BBC News , wrote a weekly column about her illness for the Sunday Mirror Magazine and worked on a book about her experience that she hoped would help others diagnosed with the disease . She cited the determination of the many disabled athletes she had got to know through her work as having given her the strength of mind to fight her illness . In October 1998 , the BBC aired a special edition of its QED documentary series titled Hope for Helen , which followed her as she underwent a course of treatment . The film earned her much support from the public for her courage. in December 1998 , colleagues paid tribute to an emotional @-@ looking Rollason during the BBC 's Sports Review of the Year , a compliment that produced mixed feelings for the presenter . She later wrote of the incident , " I felt a mixture of horror , embarrassment and incredible warmth towards my colleagues that they should think of doing this " .

In April 1999 , the BBC announced plans to overhaul its Six O 'Clock News bulletin , and that an in @-@ depth sports preview fronted by Rollason would be included in the programme 's Friday edition . She began presenting the slot in May , and made her last onscreen appearance on 18 June .

Rollason was awarded an MBE in the 1999 Birthday Honours for her services to broadcasting and charities , and in July 1999 attended a ceremony at Buckingham Palace to be presented with the honour by the Queen . Speaking about the occasion , Rollason said , " I cried when I received the news . I don 't feel I deserve it but I 'm very thrilled that so many women are coming through in sport broadcasting now . " Also in July , she received an honorary degree from the University of Brighton , which was presented to her at her home after she became too ill to attend the ceremony . Shortly before that she was honoured with an award for courage at the 1999 Pride of Britain Awards .

Rollason became involved in charity work , raising £ 5 million for a cancer wing at North Middlesex Hospital , which was named in her honour . She died on 9 August 1999 at the age of 43 , in Brentwood , Essex . On 17 August , a service of thanksgiving was held for Rollason at a church near her home , and attended by friends and colleagues . Later that month , the BBC aired Helen Rollason : The Bravest Fight , a 30 @-@ minute documentary presented by Peter Sissons in which friends and colleagues paid tribute to her . Her autobiography , Life 's Too Short , was published posthumously in 2000 .

= = Legacy = =

As the first female presenter of Grandstand , Helen Rollason was a pioneer of British sports broadcasting , an industry that was predominantly male at the time , and she established a precedent that allowed others to follow . Sue Barker , Hazel Irvine , Gail McKenna , Shelley Webb and Gabby Yorath all followed in Rollason 's footsteps to become noted UK sports presenters , with Yorath joining ITV as their first female sports presenter in the late 1990s , where she co @-@ hosted the football show On the Ball and was a contributor to The Premiership . Yorath paid tribute to Rollason shortly after her death , saying she would be " an icon for young girls who want to go into that field because she showed what could be done . She was a great example to everyone . "

On 4 November 1999 , the BBC announced the establishment of a Helen Rollason Award , to be given at the BBC Sports Personality of the Year ceremony in recognition of " outstanding achievement in the face of adversity " . Its first recipient was retired National Hunt trainer Jenny Pitman , who was herself diagnosed with cancer , and was presented with the award at that year 's ceremony on 12 December . Other Helen Rollason Award recipients include yachtswoman Ellen MacArthur in 2001 for her courage in becoming the fastest woman to circumnavigate the globe , footballer Geoff Thomas in 2005 for raising in excess of £ 150 @,@ 000 for the Leukaemia Research charity by cycling , following his own battle with the disease , and in 2014 , the competitors of the inaugural Invictus Games , a multi @-@ sport event for sick and injured service personnel , which made its debut that year .

The Sunday Times created the Helen Rollason Award for Inspiration as part of their Sportswomen of the Year Awards . Jenny Pitman was its first recipient in 1999 . Others to receive the award include student Joanna Gardiner in 2007 for her work with Football for Peace , a charity that provides football coaching to children from Jewish and Palestinian communities in Israel , Claire Lomas in 2012 who , having been paralysed following a riding accident completed that year 's London Marathon with the aid of a robotic suit , and Mel Woodards in 2014 , chair of the Somerset @-@ based Milton Nomads junior football club who established a local football league for children .

The Helen Rollason Cancer Charity was established in her name in 1999 . The charity funds and operates three cancer support centres ? in Essex , Hertfordshire and London . Lord Coe , who had known Rollason since her days in radio broadcasting , is the charity 's patron . The first Helen Rollason Cancer Care Centre was opened in Chelmsford , Essex in April 2002 @.@ in 2011 , a new research centre named after Rollason and offering treatment for patients as part of clinical trials of new cancer therapies was opened at Chelmsford 's Broomfield Hospital .

In April 2006 , Brentwood Borough Council announced that a new housing development would include a road named Rollason Way in her memory . Additionally , eleven apartment blocks within the development would be named after people associated with Rollason or winners of the BBC Sports Personality of the Year . The building names on Rollason Way include Adlington House , Boardman Place , Radcliffe House , Christie Court , Redgrave Court , Botham House , Faldo Court ,

Whitbread Place , Torvill Court , and MacArthur Place .

= = Publications = =

Rollason , Helen (2000) . Life 's Too Short . Hodder & Stoughton . ISBN 978 @-@ 0 @-@ 34076 @-@ 772 @-@ 6 .