Netball

Netball comes from an early form of basketball and is a sport that has always been 'suitable for women'. During the latter part of the Victorian era, American PE instructor Senda Berenson adapted basketball for her female students. She made the game more 'ladylike': each player could stay in only one part of the court, only hold the ball for three seconds and could not snatch. The sport became very popular amongst American girls schools, where they used waste paper baskets, hung on the walls, for nets. By 1900, netball had spread to all corners of the British Empire. In the early twentieth century, the rules developed further and domestic games were played in a few Commonwealth countries. The occasional international games were played but difficult to referee as every country had its own take on the rules. Australia and New Zealand, who called the sport women's basketball, found it exceptionally hard as they used different numbers a side: Australia used seven-a-side and New Zealand used nine. We adopted seven-a-side, and Australia and New Zealand adopted the name 'netball' in the 1970's. In the later twentieth century, the rules had standardised and international games were played more freely, the International Netball Federation (INF) was established to organise worldwide tournaments and the World Netball Championships began. Since 1998, netball has also been a sport in the Commonwealth games. Today, netball is played by over 20 million people in over eight different countries and, though it is still a 'female sport' it is enjoyed by both genders and is being considered possible inclusion in the Olympic Games.