

Dame Louise Martin: A day to celebrate Commonwealth Sport and Women's Sport

Commonwealth Day is a very special day for our Movement. It is an annual celebration observed by people all over the Commonwealth, held on the second Monday in March.

Normally, there is a prominent service held in Westminster Abbey where representatives from the Commonwealth come together in one place at one time but, due to the Covid-19 restrictions still in place across England, that will not be the case this year.

Instead, Her Majesty the Queen will deliver her annual message: 'A Celebration for Commonwealth Day', outlining the importance of our Commonwealth links.

It remains our hope, and it is an increasingly optimistic hope, that the Commonwealth Family can come together in London later this year for the start of the Birmingham 2022 Queen's Baton Relay. This is due to leave Buckingham Palace, carrying her message to connect with the athletes of the 72 nations and territories of the Commonwealth.

Even though we are unable to celebrate together in person today, Commonwealth Day still takes on a special significance for our Movement this year, as it also marks International Women's Day.

For everyone involved with Commonwealth Sport, this will focus on the exciting women's sport programme in place for Birmingham 2022, which is now only 16 months away.

It is a source of pride for me that Birmingham 2022 will be the first major multi-sport event to have more medals for women than men, providing a huge boost for women's sport.

It was a special moment last month when we were able to unveil the Birmingham 2022 competition schedule. These feature back-to-back 'Super Sundays' with nine spectacular events on July 31 (the first Sunday) that are purposely designed to fit around the soccer final of the UEFA Women's Euro 2022 tournament, which kicks off at 5pm BST that day.

Seven days later, on August 7 (the second Sunday) Birmingham 2022 will stage the medal matches for netball, women's hockey and women's T20 cricket (which will be making its debut at the Games), an incredible day that will feature 11 medal sessions!

These are just two days of an action-packed 11-day competition that will see a total of 283 medal events *take place*.

I believe that major sporting events such as the Commonwealth Games, play a very important role inspiring people in many ways, particularly being active.

With Covid-19 restrictions in place across the globe, it is more important than ever that we stay fit and healthy; which is why I am delighted to support a new initiative led by the Commonwealth Walkway Trust.

The Commonwealth Walkway itself is a safe, accessible, and attractive place in every Commonwealth nation and territory, where everyone can walk. It connects the Commonwealth with a 1,000 km walkable path, linking 100 cities, permanently marking 2,000 points of significance and providing a practical opportunity for a third of the world's population to be more active.

As we cannot travel just now, the Trust has created virtual Walkways across the Commonwealth, to inspire people to get walking again. These virtual walkways feature a special passport scheme, which rewards those who 'Walk the Commonwealth' with a certificate of achievement. I would encourage everyone to visit the [Commonwealth Walkway website](#) to find out more.

From a CGF perspective, as part of our Commonwealth Day celebrations, we are excited to have launched our 'Sport is Just the Beginning' campaign to the world. With the help of some of our Commonwealth athletes, the campaign hopes to bring the message of the Commonwealth Sport Movement to life, promoting the power of sport to change lives and the power of our communities to change the world.

This announcement feels very appropriate today when the theme of both Commonwealth Day ("Delivering a Common Future") and International Women's Day ("Achieving an Equal Future in a COVID-19 World") ask us to look ahead and focus on how we can build a better future for all.

These have been difficult times, better days are now on the horizon where we can be together again.

For these reasons and many more, Birmingham 2022 will take on an added significance for our Movement, bringing together athletes and fans to celebrate Commonwealth Sport and the shared values that unite us.

On this special day, when we celebrate Commonwealth Sport and Women's Sport, I hope this moment can warm our hearts.

Dame Louise Martin DBE is the President of the Commonwealth Games Federation. She was elected to the role by the Commonwealth Sport Movement in September 2015 in Auckland,

New Zealand, becoming the first female to hold the prestigious office.