

Heart of the Game – Case Study: Impact of Pre-Activity Blood Pressure Checks



At Blackbridge, a series of blood pressure checks were introduced in the lead-up to walking football sessions as part of the Heart of the Game NHS prevention and wellbeing initiative. The aim was to support early identification of cardiovascular risk factors and encourage healthier lifestyle choices through community sport.

One participant, our **Freedom Volunteer, Ken Blackburn (Head of Football Development, Tuffley Rovers FC and former professional footballer)**, shared his experience following several weeks of testing.

Despite a lifelong involvement in football and maintaining an active lifestyle at 74, Ken reflected that he had previously taken his health for granted. The routine blood pressure checks revealed slightly elevated readings, which acted as a meaningful prompt for change.

Rather than causing concern, the results became a catalyst for positive action. Ken reported that the feedback encouraged him to re-evaluate key aspects of his lifestyle, particularly his diet and alcohol intake, and to take a more proactive approach to managing his long-term health. He described the initiative as a “thoughtful and forward-looking” approach and expressed appreciation for the care and foresight shown in embedding health checks within a familiar and welcoming sporting environment.

Participant reflection (Ken Blackburn):

“Being an ex-professional footballer and still trying to keep fit and working at 74, I had been guilty of taking my health for granted. Not anymore. The slightly high readings have made me give more thought to my eating habits and alcohol intake. A big thank you for the foresight and care given to Blackbridge users.”

Impact summary:

- Early identification of elevated blood pressure in an active older adult
- Immediate behaviour change intentions around diet and alcohol consumption
- Increased health awareness in a traditionally hard-to-reach male demographic
- Reinforcement of walking football as a trusted setting for preventative health interventions
- Strong engagement from participants who may not otherwise access routine health checks

This case highlights the value of embedding NHS health screening within community sport environments, demonstrating how small, non-clinical interventions can prompt meaningful lifestyle reflection and behaviour change.