

## Beyond Silence": A Week of Recognition, Advocacy, and Celebration

National Deaf Awareness Week 2025 (May 5–11), with the powerful theme "*Beyond Silence*", was especially meaningful to me this year. It's a time to raise awareness about deafness, to celebrate Deaf culture and language, and to highlight the unique ways Deaf people communicate. More importantly, it's a time to advocate for accessibility, inclusivity, and equal opportunities for all.

There couldn't have been a better week to reflect on recognition—not just for me, but for what it represents. Being Deaf doesn't limit one's ability to dream, achieve, and make a difference.



I was deeply honoured to attend the Royal Garden Party for the second time, following my King's Birthday Honour in 2023, where I was awarded the British Empire Medal (BEM) for services to Health and Social Care. Sharing that moment with my eldest son, Zac, was unforgettable. I stood there not just for myself, but for everyone who works tirelessly to support, educate, and empower—across communities, services, and society.

Later that week, I travelled to Manchester, where I was humbled to receive the *Highly Commended Inspirational Referee Award* from The Football Association at the National Football Museum. This recognition reflects my dedication to refereeing, from grassroots to the international stage—as a Deaf Referee and as an advocate for inclusivity in mainstream football.

To date, I remain the only International Deaf Referee in England. I had the honour of officiating at the Deaf World Cup in Malaysia in 2023, including a semi-final match. In 2024, I proudly refereed for the Deaf Women's England Team at Wembley—a moment that was both emotional and historic.



Looking ahead, I've been selected as a Match Official for the Deaflympics in Tokyo this November—an opportunity I am incredibly proud to accept. My hope is that this work continues to open doors and help make Deaf refereeing a recognised and professional pathway.



This journey has not been without its challenges—inequality, inaccessibility, and communication barriers—but I've always focused on finding solutions. Using my lived experience and skills, I aim to break down those barriers and lead by example.

As a proud BSL (British Sign Language) user, I believe in showing what's possible when the right support is in place. I'll continue to advocate for a more inclusive world, where Deaf people can lead, thrive, and succeed. I hope to be a role model for current and future generations.

Together, we go *beyond silence*—to be seen, heard, and fully included.

Thank you all for your continued support on this journey. A special thanks to all the referees in Dorset and Wessex—it all began in Dorset with that very first referee course. And thank you, Kevin Pike, for your unwavering support over the years.

I look forward to the new season when the time comes. Wishing you all a wonderful summer.

**Paul (Kirb)**