

Astrid Roper



Ladies 1's and U18's

Hockey Career

I started hockey at age 6 years, but my introduction to hockey began much earlier as I was always on the side-lines watching my older brother and sister.

When I was less than two years old, my parents put me on the waiting list to join my sister in the juniors at Teddington Hockey Club. I didn't get a place as it was so oversubscribed, so I did a year at Indian Gymkhana and then a year at Sunbury Hockey Club. I eventually joined the U8's group and played through all the junior sections, right up to the point where I am now in the U18s.

The weekend I turned 13, with the encouragement of my coach, I played my first match for the Ladies 7's. In that first game I was marking someone, who was really old (I have it in my mind that she said she was 87!). Anyway, she would say to me, 'Tell me where you are going

to run to so that I can get a head start!' That was the point at which I began playing in the Ladies' section and I have worked my way up through the teams to playing for the 1's for the past two seasons.

Neil Guilder came to the club when I was 11 and he started coaching the U12 girls' team. That year we went to the Nationals for the first time ever and I think that we came around 10th – not bad for our first time. We made it again with the U14's and U16's team and this year, we are in the U18's semi-final.

Some of my closest friendships are with the girls, who I met in the juniors' section of the club. We have grown up together and some of us have gone through a lot together. I have known CJ and Emily since I joined this club and more recently, Annie (Annika) who joined in the U16's, but it feels like I have known her forever. We became friends immediately and we even holidayed together. I love the friends that I have made here, and I know that we will be friends for life. It is amazing that even now, when we play as an U18's team, we play so intuitively. We know exactly where each other will be on the pitch, and this even though there are few opportunities to train together because of all our other hockey commitments.



Annika, Astrid and CJ

I have also coached at the hockey club. I started doing it for my Duke of Edinburgh award and have continued since. This season, I have coached U10, U12 and U14 girls' teams. Most Sundays, I coach U12 and U14's and I also go to tournaments with all three age groups. When there is no U18 game on a Sunday, I coach instead. I love it. The club has done so much for me. It has seen me go through so many ups and downs. I've experienced almost everything at Teddington, so I want to give back.

Obviously, I play a lot of hockey. In fact, I play 8 times a week between school and club hockey which means triple training one day and double training another.

My parents are supportive. Neither of them has a background in hockey, but Dad does not miss a match. He has been to see me play in every single hockey match that I have played in over the years. My teams love to hear his support on the side-lines.



Highlights

The highlight of my career to date is when I was playing for the U18's last year against Seven Oaks in the Plate final (Tier 1). We were up 1-0 when we went down to 8 players because of three cards! It was so stressful, particularly as I play in defence. We held them off until the last play of the game which was their short corner. A controversial goal was allowed, following which there was a huge discussion. However, after an interminable amount of time, the final whistle was blown to signal that the goal had been disallowed and that we had therefore won. We just all ran together. It was an incredible feeling because we had worked so hard -with only eight players and the match had been so stressful and so tough.

Beating Surbiton is always a highlight. Neil Guilder is due to dye his hair pink at some point in celebration of our U16 end of season defeat of 1-0 against Surbiton. We have not forgotten!

Socials with the ladies are always good fun and some of the double headers at home with the men are great because we get big crowds on the side-line. That's so uplifting.



What hockey has taught me

My confidence has come from playing hockey, my communication skills, learning to deal with different people, whether grumpy parents on the side-lines, an eight-year-old in a coaching session or being alongside a teammate who needs help.

Learning to lose –what a valuable lesson that has been. There are negative ways to dealing with losing and positive ways. It is important to understand that things are not always going to go your way and to take time, and not to give too much time sitting with disappointment. Defeat has taught me how to be resilient, but more than that how to deal with messing up. What is so great about THC is that there are no judgements or negative repercussions if you mess up. You are instead shown how to do it differently next time - to do it in a better way.

I remember when I was about 14, I went through a bad phase where if I made a mistake in a game, it would completely throw me. I would panic and be unable to let go of it, so it impacted everything I did after that point. It meant that I was unable to finish the game and

as a result, I would have to come off. With the support of my coaches, and working on myself, I was able to overcome this crippling mindset, learning to be more goldfish and letting go immediately of any mistakes I made in the game. I would tell myself, 'I've made a mistake, I can move on.' It took time, but this positive mind-set has helped me in so many other aspects of my life. Now, when I am sitting exams, I won't allow one question, which I don't know, throw the rest of the paper.

Resilience is key and I have found this more so when I have been out through injury. I have found that yoga helps and supporting the team. You are still part of the team even if you are injured and they value you being there.

Top tips to anyone learning hockey: learning the skills is progressive. It takes time and you need to pay attention to the small stuff, such as how you hold the stick, how hard you grip. Small changes in your body position can make such a difference to your hockey game. Care and attention to detail from the beginning is so important. Take it slowly and improve it bit by bit.

My ambition in hockey

I want to play at a high level and enjoy it. That is what is so great about Teddington –both of those things can be achieved here.



THC Ladies' 1's: Winners of Women's Conference East in March 2025.

Three words to sum up Teddington Hockey Club:

- **Hardworking:** players and coaches, parents, everyone puts the work in
- **Community:** the friends who I play hockey with range from 16 to their twenties.
- **Encouraging:** everyone wants you to do your best. When I was struggling with aerials, different members of the club offered advice and supported me in mastering the skill. Everyone was so willing to help. The coaches are key in seeing the potential in young players and helping them progress.