

Top ref puts away his cards to take part in cycle event



CHALLENGE: Tania Ansell, of St David's Hospice Care, with football referee Martin Atkinson (also pictured right), at the start of the Whistle Stop Tour which raised funds for four charities, including St David's Hospice Care

PREMIER League referee Martin Atkinson will be keeping his yellow and red cards firmly in his pocket when he pulls on the orange jersey at the weekend.

The keen cyclist, who rode 1,700 miles as part of the Whistle Stop Tour from England's training ground in Staffordshire to Kalinograd, Russia, during the 2018 World Cup, is again helping raise funds in support of Newport's St David's Hospice Care. This time he is taking part in the Whitehead Tour de Gwent.

The highly-respected, 50-year-old Premier League and International football referee has signed up for the toughest of the six event distances - the 93-mile Platinum route, which is the first to get under way from Caerleon Pavilion at 7.30am on Sunday.

The annual Whitehead Tour de Gwent, sponsored by Whitehead Building Services, attracts hundreds of riders and raises thousands of pounds for St David's Hospice Care.

Martin said: "The reason I am supporting St David's Hospice Care is because of the wonderful work they continue to do to support so many people. Having visited the hospice and having seen firsthand the care they

offer left me humbled by just how much impact they have on people's lives.

"The staff there are so caring and the service they provide is invaluable. After my visit there I realised just how lucky and fortunate I am. I must admit it touched me, and if I can do anything to help and support the wonderful work the hospice does then I try and do that.

"The Whistle Stop Tour 2018 was hard! But, again, knowing that we were helping to support the charities, then it made it so worthwhile.

"It was certainly physically the hardest thing I have ever done. Completing a 100 miles a day, for nearly three weeks, across Europe was an experience I will never forget.

"I think my legs have just about recovered!

"I'm 50 years young, age is only a number and I would say to anyone not yet signed up to do any stage of the Tour De Gwent to give it a go. Cycling is a great way to exercise, the friendship and support on a group ride is brilliant. It's like they say, you never forget how to ride a bike and the feeling of achievement is brilliant.

"I'm really looking forward to the cycle on Sunday. We cycled from Bourne-

mouth to Swansea on the Premier League ride 2016 and then up to West Bromwich. I remember cycling in Wales and just how beautiful the scenery is, although hilly!

"The Premier League, PGMOL and their partners have always been very supportive of the charity events that myself and colleagues complete. I wouldn't be able to support such events without their help and encouragement. This is really appreciated and I would like to thank them for their constant support."

Newport-headquartered Whitehead Building Services managing director Rhys Morton, who as well as sponsoring the event also takes part, said: "We're thrilled to have Martin's support. Martin is a renowned referee and an accomplished cyclist. We're honoured to have him take part and to help raise funds for St David's Hospice Care."

Event organiser Tania Ansell, of St David's Hospice Care, said: "I was honoured to have been able to help flag Martin off from England's training base when he set off on the Whistle Stop Tour to raise funds for four charities, including St David's Hospice Care.

"It's fabulous that Martin,

who has visited our hospice in Newport, is now taking part in the Whitehead Tour de Gwent."

Whitehead Tour de Gwent has six carefully-designed routes to choose from, each with their own unique features. The event offers something for cyclists of all abilities - from hardcore cyclists looking for an epic leg-burning challenge to families who'd prefer a pleasant 'there-and-back' along the River Usk.

Tania said: "The event is great for spectators as well as those doing the pedalling. Spectators are invited to enjoy a few hours exploring the local area or head out to cheer the riders along.

"By taking part in the Tour de Gwent you are supporting the work of St David's Hospice Care, which means you are making a positive difference to patients and their families.

"The sponsorship you raise will help to provide comprehensive palliative care to people facing life limiting illnesses and provide care and support to their families at a very difficult time."

For full details of all the routes, detailed maps and how to enter the Whitehead Tour de Gwent 2021, visit www.tourdegwent.org.

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