

THE WOMEN'S FOOTBALL MAGAZINE

Issue 67—March 2023



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THE WOMEN'S FOOTBALL MAGAZINE



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Welcome

***Hello and
welcome to
Issue 68!***

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Happy International Women's Day everyone!

We have a very exciting month ahead as we look forward to our next print issue which is coming out in April.

We have now got a printed subscription and joint subscription so make sure you check out our new offers (and all our subscriptions are cheaper too!)

There is some fabulous articles in this issue looking ahead to Women's Football Weekend, back at the international break and of course covering the first domestic trophy of the season.

If you live in or around Manchester make sure you keep an eye out for an exciting event we are part of at the end of the month. We will be announcing all the information soon.

Don't forget to tweet us in any photos of you at games so we can use them in our next magazine.

Enjoy the issue!

Helen Rowe-Willcocks

 **Editor-in-Chief**
@helenrw11

Winners announced for 'Design a Front Page' competition



the Women's Football Magazine (TWFM) and English Schools FA (ESFA) are excited to announce the winner and runners-up from their 'Design a Front Page' competition.

The competition, run in association with Schools' Football Week, challenged school children to design the front cover of TWFM's April print magazine focusing on the next generation of women's footballers in the UK.

Over 100 entries were received from more than 21 schools and a panel of judges from TWFM and the ESFA were hard pressed to choose a winning entry. We are delighted to announce that Indie from Grey Court school is the winner of the competition, and her artwork will become the front cover of the TWFM printed edition in April.

As well as receiving a copy of the magazine featuring her artwork and an annual digital subscription to TWFM, Indie, aged 14, has also won a TWFM 'season ticket' for Grey Court which will give 25 annual digital subscriptions to be shared with teachers, parents, pupils and supporters.

We are also excited to reveal that due to the high standard of entries, five runners-up are also being rewarded. All runners up will receive a copy of the April magazine and a TWFM annual individual digital subscription.

The five runners-up, whose artwork will also feature in the April Magazine, are:

Florence, age 11 – Aughton Town Green Primary

Isabella, age 14 – Outwood Valley Academy

Isla, age 11 – St. Veronicas

Simrah, age 11 – Our Lady Queen of Heaven Catholic Primary School

Sophie, age 8 – Stormont School

Helen Rowe-Willcocks, editor of TWFM said: "We were delighted by the number and quality of the entries we received from all age groups. It certainly made judging very difficult. Seeing the love for women's football grow amongst the young generations is fantastic and with initiatives like Schools' Football Week, it will continue to strengthen."

Stuart Botham, ESFA Chair said, "On behalf of the English Schools' FA (ESFA), I was delighted that we were

asked to support The Women's Football Magazine with their 'design a front page competition, launched during Schools' Football Week 2023. As the National Governing Body for Schools' Football in England, the continual growth and promotion of the girls' game is a high priority for us, which is why we are keen to support the work carried out by TWFM. This competition was a great fit for the Association, as we work to encourage football to be brought into the classroom, creating inclusivity for all children that are interested in the sport to participate in a way that works for them. The entries received were of superb quality and the participants didn't make the judging process easy. I would like to thank all those schools that supported this activity and also congratulate all those pupils that submitted their entries for this competition. I very much look forward to seeing the final article in April."

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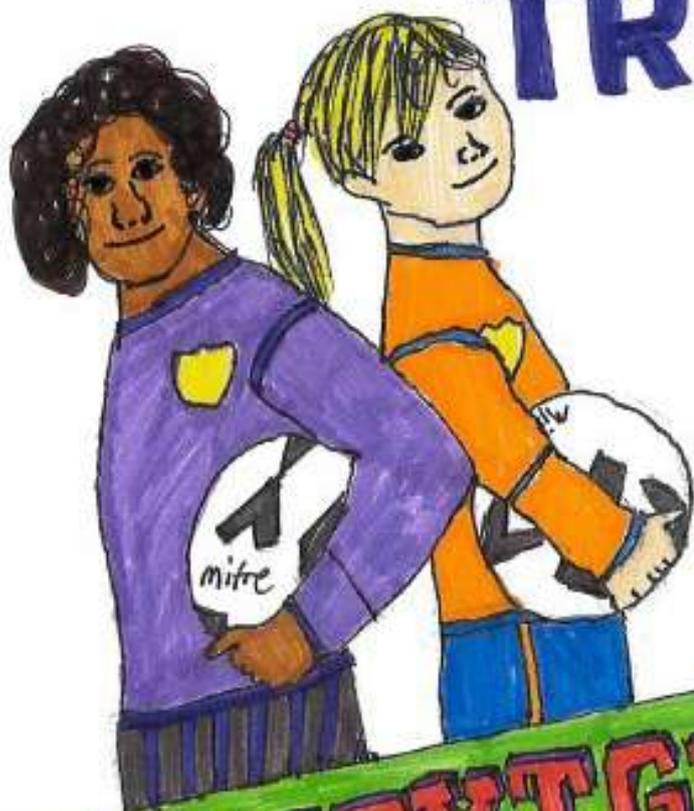
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BELIEVE

TRAIN

SUCCEED

INSPIRE



THE NEXT GENERATION

Dream big! We can do this together!



BARCLAYS WOMEN'S SUPER LEAGUE

Aston Villa request formal hearing after charge



Aston Villa plan to request a formal hearing with the Football Association (FA) after being charged with “failing to ensure their players conducted themselves in an orderly fashion.”

The charges relate to two incidents during the Vitality FA Cup fifth round win over West Ham on February 26.

Carla Ward’s side had a goal ruled out in extra time which was seen as controversial at the time and it is alleged that the Villa players “surrounded a match official twice” during the cup tie - in the 122nd minute and following the final whistle.

Manager Ward said: “We are strongly disappointed in the charges.

“The club are responding and will be

requesting a formal hearing, face to face. “That’s all we will say on it at the moment.”

Villa defender Rachel Corsie thought she had given her side a 2-1 lead with the last kick of the match but it was ruled out for an alleged foul on West Ham goalkeeper Mackenzie Arnold.

Asked how costly that decision could have been, Ward said: “The ramifications could have been huge but thankfully they weren't. There will be a lengthy response going in.”

Villa have until March 6 to respond.

Interview: Megan Finnigan



Sports Press Photo

By Helen Rowe-Willcocks

Everton are gearing up for their game of the season on Women's Football Weekend.

The Toffees will be walking out at Goodison Park to play Liverpool in the Merseyside derby and after beating them 3-0 at Anfield earlier in the season, they are ready to do it again.

Helen Rowe-Willcocks sat down with Megan Finnigan to discuss the fixture and the Barclays Women's Super League.

You came through the Everton academy, Everton has been a part of you for a long time, how excited are you about playing at Goodison Park?

It's amazing. When I was in the academy, they were always the games that stick out to you. Playing against Liverpool is always an important game. They're always tasty – even the

ten-year-olds put in some serious tackles! You have to turn up in terms of passion and fight. I remember there was one game where I didn't show up and I didn't play well and my mum and dad slaughtered me for it because it was a Merseyside derby. It was only under-12s but it has stuck with me. We are looking forward to it as a team. On the back of the Anfield win, we want to replicate that. People will be expecting us to win so we have to make sure we turn up.

You just mentioned the 3-0 win over Everton, you scored in that game, are you hoping to do that again?

Absolutely. It would be lovely. I try not to think about it because when I don't think about it, it happens. Going into the Anfield game, I wasn't thinking about scoring. I was coming back from injury and I

was just concentrating on getting through the game. Scoring was a great feeling. I have obviously imagined scoring at Goodison Park, it would be amazing and I am sure that I would act accordingly – as I did at Anfield.

You made your debut back in 2015, looking back then did you ever imagine you would be getting the crowds you are getting at Walton Hall Park and at Goodison Park?

Not at all. When I made my debut it was relatively quiet at the stadium in Widnes. I don't know what the attendance was but it would have been a couple of hundred.

Now it feels like it's full week in, week out. At Anfield it felt amazing in front of 30,000 people. It shows how far the game has come.

You have gone through a lot of the England youth set-up, including captaining the U19s, what has that been like?

Playing for England growing up was always such a proud moment for me. My favourite time of the year was coming up to camp. That was some of the best times of my life playing in those teams. I remember standing there singing the national anthem, I always used to feel so proud.

We won bronze in the U20s World Cup, that's still a standout moment for us. I used to love it. From the moment I made my international youth debut, I always had aspirations to go into the seniors. That has not happened yet but I still hope that one day, never say never. I think as I have grown up and played more consistently for Everton, then my focus has changed to Everton. When I was younger I would count down the days to be with England. Now my main focus is to be performing week in, week out for Everton.

Looking back a couple of years ago in the WSL, you could always guess which couple of clubs would run away with the season, it's so much more open now and much more exciting, have you seen the changes as a player playing in a more competitive league?

It's so exciting. If you look at the top four at the minute, it's still really open and there are a few teams fighting for survival.

There is a lot of competition. From my perspective, it is getting a lot tougher each year. I used to play in midfield, now I look and think if I was playing in midfield now I would find it

a heck of a lot tougher. The standard is getting better and better each year especially with players coming from overseas as well. It can be a shock because it's getting more appealing for people to watch as well.

One of the things which often gets commented on in the women's game is the crowds and atmosphere being so friendly and family orientated, do you think that is something that will continue as the fanbase grows?

It's a tough one. I think you want a balance of both the family orientated and the rivalries. When I scored at Anfield I remember the Liverpool fans booing at us because we were celebrating and I actually really enjoyed that. I think you want more of that but you don't want it to go too far.

I always think that we don't want it to go away from that family feel that is so special to the game. It's what makes us so special. We don't want to be always compared to the men's game. That's something that is very particular to the women's game. It's a fine balance but it's nice to see all the families coming down.



Match of the month: Brighton & Hove Albion 2-6 Aston Villa



Natalie Mincher/SPP

By Abbie Smith

Broadfield Stadium welcomed Carla Ward's Aston Villa on the Sunday 12th February 2023.

Ward opted for a 4-3-3 with Rachel Daly, Kirsty Hanson, and Alisha Lehmann up top and young Hannah Hampton between the sticks. New signings Lucy Staniforth and Jordan Nobbs were also in the starting eleven. Meanwhile, Brighton manager Jens Scheuer sent out his team in a 4-2-3-1. Lee Geum-Min acted as the lone striker, with Veatriki Sarri, Katie Robinson, and Megan Connolly in support behind her.

Brighton started the game strong, buzzing around the Villa defence and keeping the ball. After just 3 minutes, Brighton forward Julia Zigiotti Olme opened the scoring. Olme connected beautifully with Sarri's corner, positioning herself by the penalty spot and heading the ball downwards into the bottom corner.

Staniforth made it 1-1 with a looping header over the Brighton defence. Kenza Dali's corner curled perfectly into the path of the midfielder, setting up her first goal for Villa. Staniforth joined Aston Villa on an 18-month contract in the January transfer window after her contract at Manchester

United was terminated. After only two games at her new club, she looks to be finding her feet.

After only 2 minutes, Villa took the lead thanks to Hanson. After an exquisite piece of team play, Nobbs received the ball at the edge of the Brighton box. Pulling from her dizzying repertoire of skills, Nobbs sprayed a well-timed pass through to Dali. With her first touch, Dali whipped the ball into the sea of claret and blue, picking out Hanson who slotted home her fourth of the season. 2-1 Villa, game on!

Nobbs opened her Villa account in style, scoring three goals in only her second game.

Hanson worked her magic once more, escaping the throes of the Brighton defence towards the edge of the box. With pinpoint precision, she squared it to Nobbs who found a pocket of space between the defence and lifted the ball over Brighton keeper Lydia Williams.

Villa got their 4th goal in the 36th minute thanks to Rachel Daly. Daly drove down the pitch, the ball glued to her feet, leaving the Brighton defence in her wake. The midfielder threaded the ball through the outstretched legs of her opponents and into Hanson's stride. Daly was in the right place at the right time, snatching up Hanson's pass and leaving Williams with no chance. Daly has been one of the WSL's standout performers in this campaign, scoring 10 goals in 13 matches, and retaining her place in the Lionesses camp during this year's successful Arnold Clark Cup campaign.

Nobbs got her second goal less than 10 minutes later. Yet another Hanson assist, this time an elegant chip over the heads of The Seagulls, straight into the feet of Nobbs. With a cheeky first touch, Nobbs took the ball past Williams and into the back of the net. The brace was officially on!

A foul on Lee Geum-Min inside the box gave Brighton a chance to pull one back. Up stepped Danielle Carter. Villa stopper Hampton dove the right way, getting a glove to the penalty but ultimately, Carter wasn't going to miss the chance to bag a goal back for her team. With 4 goals and 1 assist in 10 appearances so far this season, the forward is a key player for The Seagulls.

Nobbs' third- Villa's sixth- of the game came in the 69th minute after Daly intercepted a pass from Brighton substitute Kayleigh Green in the final third. The Seagulls looked panicked, the midfield stretched thin, thus allowing Daly to thread a pass through and into space for Nobbs. She took one touch, two, before striking the ball with her laces and sending it screaming into the top right hand corner. The strike answered to the quality of Nobbs' performance, showcasing what she can do with a bit of time on the ball. The England international joined Villa in the January transfer window, bidding farewell to Arsenal after 12 years. Whilst playing for the Gunners, she made 270 appearances and scored 81 goals as well as lifting the WSL title three times, the Women's FA Cup four times, and the FA Women's League Cup five times.

Statistically, the game was evenly split. Villa had 55% of possession with Brighton having 45%. Villa had more shots on target (17 to Brighton's 7) and had a higher passing accuracy (81%), yet the difference wasn't staggering; The Villans managed their time on the ball more efficiently and pushed every move towards goal whereas The Seagulls sat back and, at times, tread carefully and away from goal.

On the whole, Villa are moulding into a team to watch out for. Sitting in 5th in the WSL on 20 points, they appear to be a cohesive, motivated unit, losing only once in their last five games. With their new signings making an instant impact, The Villans look to be on the up. Taking advantage of Rachel Daly's versatility and playing

her as a forward rather than in her typical defensive role is a smart move, one that has led to her topping the WSL goal scoring charts alongside Khadija 'Bunny' Shaw; both are currently on 10 goals. Lionesses fans will be holding out hope that Daly will continue her run of form through the 2023 Women's World Cup this summer and lead Sarina Wiegman's team to the trophy.

Yellow Cards: Sarah Mayling (80').

Goals: Julia Zigiotti Olme (3'), Lucy Staniforth (15'), Kirsty Hanson (17'), Jordan Nobbs (23', 43', 69'), Rachel Daly (36'), Danielle Carter (49') (P)



Canada team forced to call off strike

The Canadian squad had originally planned to strike against their governing body, due to the inadequate funding towards women's football.

The players have since called off the strike in fear of personal and financial risk, but Tottenham's Shelina Zadorsky says the team are "not going to back down."

Leicester bid for WSL safety

The Foxes claimed their second WSL win of the season following a 1-0 victory away to Liverpool.

Hannah Cain notched the only goal of the game, with several teams above them now in danger of finishing bottom.

Super seven sees Chelsea into a cup final

The Conti Cup final awaits for the Blues on 5 March at Selhurst Park after they struck seven past West Ham in the semi-final.

Four goals from Sam Kerr helped the side secure a huge tie against Arsenal, with thousands of tickets already sold.

First-time international call-ups

There were two first-time call-ups to the Republic of Ireland squad after Manchester United centre-back Aoife Mannion and Washington Spirit midfielder Marissa Sheva got the call from Vera Pauw.

Ruesha Littlejohn also made a welcome return to the squad who travelled to a training camp in Spain as part of their World Cup preparations.

Clubs form group to plan future of women's game

A new group of executives from WSL and Championship clubs have met to plan and develop a "long-term vision" for women's football in England.

The Professional Game Working Group's first workshop has taken place with the goal to establish a company who will run top-flight football from the start of the 24/25 season.

Jordan Nobbs named WSL's Player of the Month for February

The Aston Villa star has had some standout performances since moving from Arsenal in January and scored a hat-trick against Brighton in a 6-2 victory before the international break.

Nobbs was part of the squad that clinched the Arnold Clark Cup with England.

Man City's Gareth Taylor claimed the Manager of the Month award.

Lydia Bedford joins Arsenal

The former Leicester City boss has joined WSL rivals Arsenal months after parting ways with the Foxes.

Bedford joins the Gunners as an assistant coach, working alongside manager Jonas Eidevall.

Lauren James win February's Goal of the Month

The Chelsea star claimed the WSL Goal of the Month award for her sensational solo strike during their 3-2 victory over Spurs.

James sprinted past three attempted challenges before nestling the ball into the far corner, following earlier goals from Jess Carter and Guro Reiten.

Brighton manager Jens Scheuer watched heavy defeat eight times

The Seagulls manager admitted he watched their 6-2 WSL loss to Aston Villa eight times over the international break.

The defeat left them two points above the relegation zone after conceding 39 goals in 11 league matches.

"My job as a coach is to analyse everything and realise what we should do better," he said.

Eveliina Summanen banned for two games

Tottenham's Summanen has been banned for two games for deceiving the referee in the WSL clash against Man United.

The Finnish midfielder held her face to get Ella Toone sent off in their 2-1 defeat to the Reds, but the red card was later rescinded, with Summanen facing disciplinary action.

Emma Coates to take charge of England Under-23s

England Women Under-19s boss Emma Coates is to take charge of the Under-23s side from the start of the 23/24 season.

The former Doncaster Rovers Belles head coach will take over from Mo Marley.

Lewes make cup history

The Championship side have reached the FA Cup quarter-final for the first time in their history, and are the lowest ranked side left in the competition.

The squad were up against tier four side Cardiff City in the last round and snatched a 6-1 victory, earning a quarter-final tie against Man United.

Meanwhile Reading will face Chelsea, Villa play Man City and Birmingham will meet Brighton.

Manchester City stars make dreams come true for four young footballers ahead of International Women's Day



By Helen Rowe-Willcocks

The sky is the limit for four aspiring female footballers from the United Arab Emirates after an invitation from Manchester City Women turned into the trip of a lifetime thanks to Etihad Airways, the UAE's national carrier.

For girls, Madiyah, 12, Meriel and Sura, both 11, and Zarah, 9, who all attend City Football Schools in the UAE, mid-week coaching in Abu Dhabi typically ends with a tactical de-brief.

In a heart-warming video released to celebrate International Women's Day, the girls were thrilled to receive a personal message from England Lionesses, Chloe

Kelly and Lauren Hemp, and Australia's Hayley Raso, in which they were invited to join them as Manchester City matchday mascots for the Women's Super League fixture against Arsenal at the Academy Stadium on the Etihad Campus in Manchester.

Unknown to the girls, Etihad Airways had booked the players, their parents and coaches onto an eight-hour flight that evening from Abu Dhabi International Airport to Manchester.

As part of the experience, the young female players enjoyed behind-the-scenes access to Manchester City Women's final training session before the match and were lucky enough to have photos and signatures with

some of their role models from the club.

Georgia Bainbridge, City Football Schools Coach, said, "When we were told about the surprise and asked to put forward four girls, Madiyah, Meriel, Sura and Zarah immediately sprung to mind. They have demonstrated fantastic skills and potential, but their attitude to training is outstanding and something all the coaches at City Football Schools in the UAE really admire.

"We want to continue to inspire our female players and promote women's football as much as we can in the UAE which has been helped massively following the Women's Euros and Chloe Kelly's winning goal. She's a player the girls

admire and hope one day to emulate so having the chance to watch her and the rest of the team train before meeting them was incredible.”

Before leading out the team as match day mascots in front of a sell-out crowd, the girls also toured the Etihad Stadium and the home dressing room, where screams could be heard around Manchester as their personalised matchday shirts took pride of place.

Amina Taher, Vice President Brand, Marketing and Sponsorships from Etihad Airways, said: “The UAE places a strong emphasis on elevating the role of women in society and as the national airline we are fully engaged with this mission.

We’re proud to work with our long-standing partners City Football Group to champion the inclusion and empowerment of young women ahead of this year’s International Women’s Day.

“It was an honour to fly Madiyah, Meriel, Sura and Zarah to Manchester to visit the Etihad Stadium and meet their Manchester City heroes.”

To watch the full video visit Etihad Airways You Tube channel here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p7Oz9Ch2vLo>



Carney appoints expert panel to support major review of women's football



- Former professional footballer turned pundit Ian Wright and former Lionesses head coach Hope Powell to advise Carney on next stage of review
- Wider group of sports executives including from the NFL will offer advice in areas such as commercial and grassroots participation
- Carney today meets with Chelsea women's head coach Emma Hayes at Kingsmeadow Stadium

Football pundit and former professional footballer Ian Wright and former Lionesses head coach Hope Powell will advise a review looking at ways to boost participation and strengthen the commercial standing of women's football in the UK.

Representatives from the NFL, the Women in Football group, sports business administrators and campaigners have also

been appointed by review chair Karen Carney.

Carney, a former England and Great Britain footballer, was commissioned by the UK government to look at the state of the women's professional game, from the grassroots to the elite level, following a recommendation in the fan-led review of football governance.

Carney has spent the last six months gathering evidence and today's appointment of a panel of football and commercial experts will help shape the recommendations her review will make to the government. The review is expected to be published in the summer.

The women's game has made significant progress in recent years, with UEFA Women's EURO 2022 highlighting the changing attitudes to women's sport. Records were shattered: there was a record global audience of more than 365 million people, almost 575,000 tickets were sold, with nearly half of ticket holders female and almost 100,000 children.

There were sell-out crowds wherever the Lionesses played, and the final broke the all-time record attendance for a EUROs final - in either the men's or women's game.

Carney announced the panel as she met with Chelsea FC Women head coach Emma Hayes at Kingsmeadow Stadium to discuss the review's progress, early findings and get her views on the state of the domestic game.

Ian Wright has become a highly respected voice on the state of the women's game while Hope Powell was the first black and first female head coach of an England national team. She was also head coach at Brighton & Hove Albion Women's Football Club.

Other appointees include Jane Purdon, chair of the Professional Game Academy Audit Company and director of the Women in Football group. She is a former director of governance at the Premier League and co-authored the

Code for Sports Governance in 2016.

Brett Gosper, head of Europe and UK for the National Football League (NFL) and a former CEO of World Rugby, will advise on how to improve the fan experience. Dan Jones, a former global lead partner for sports business at Deloitte, will examine the commercial and financial model of the women's professional club game.

Lisa O'Keefe is the secretary general of the International Working Group on Women and Sport. A former director of insight at Sport England, O'Keefe helped deliver the widely acclaimed 'This Girl Can' campaign which has successfully persuaded nearly four million women to get active since its launch in 2015. She will look at how to improve grassroots participation.

Chair of the review of domestic women's football Karen Carney MBE said: "For this review, it was important to me to get the advice and support of experts across various fields, from sport to business.

"So I'm really pleased that Hope, Ian, Jane, Brett, Dan and Lisa have come on board.

"Their experience, expertise and understanding of the world of sport will be incredibly valuable as we set out our recommendations for the growth of the game.

"Best of all, I know they share my ambition to make the UK one of the best places in the world to play, watch and invest in women's football."

Culture Secretary Lucy Frazer said: "There has been a huge surge in interest in women's football over the past year and

now is the time to supercharge the game's growth.

"Karen has chosen a range of experts from different fields to help make sure her review can really revolutionise the game, from the grassroots to the elite level, and do so in a positive and sustainable way.

"This panel will bring valuable knowledge to help boost the commercial side of the sport while improving participation."

The review, launched in September 2022, has a particular focus on:

1. Assessing the potential audience reach and growth of the game - by considering the value and visibility of women's and girls' football in England, including the potential to grow the fanbase for women's football and whether current growth can be achieved without overstressing infrastructure.
2. Examining the financial health of the game and its financial sustainability for the long term. This will include exploring opportunities and ways to support the commercialisation of the women's game, broadcast revenue opportunities and the sponsorship of women's football.
3. Examining the structures within women's football. This includes the affiliation with men's teams, prize money, the need for women's football to adhere to the administrative requirements of the men's game; and assessing the adequacy, quality,

accessibility and prevalence of the facilities available for women's and girls' football for the growth and sustainability of the game.

Since the launch of the review, Carney has asked for written evidence from a range of stakeholders from across the women's game and met people from across the women's football community.

This includes the technical staff and players at several Women's Super League and Women's Championship clubs, former players, the football authorities and representatives from other organisations to discuss the issues facing the game's development.

She has also met with financial and commercial experts, alongside major broadcasters and sponsors to discuss the game's financial health and broadcast rights.



Williamson awarded Freedom of Milton Keynes



England Lionesses captain Leah Williamson became the first person to be given Freedom of the New City of Milton Keynes.

The Milton Keynes born captain was awarded the honour on Tuesday, February 28.

Following a call from local leaders, MK City Council has now awarded the England Captain Freedom of the City.

Leah Williamson is the first person to be given Freedom of the City since Milton Keynes gained the title as part of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in 2022.

The Freedom of the City is an honour given by a local council in recognition of exceptional service and achievements.

It is one of the oldest lasting traditional ceremonies.

"Congratulations to MK-born England Captain Leah Williamson, who (tonight) received Freedom of the City of Milton Keynes in recognition of her achievements," the City Council said.

Milton Keynes had several proud links to the successful tournament last summer.

Stadium MK hosted four games - including one of the all-important semi-final matches. The semi-final game's attendance of 27,445 at Stadium MK made it the biggest crowd to ever

attend a UEFA Women's EURO semi-final not involving the host nation.

Councillor Shanika Mahendran said after the event: "It was an honour to give my maiden speech this evening nominating Leah Williamson for Freedom of the City.

"As I said in my speech, Leah doesn't just show little girls they can have a seat at the table—they can sit at the top of it.

"Milton Keynes is so proud of her."

Speaking about returning to Milton Keynes to the BBC, Williamson said: "My family will be there. Obviously it's an important time to be with them as well, so, it's sort of a full circle.

"It's one of those sort of moments when you stop and think.

"It's probably a good time for reflection and to appreciate.

"I hope my legacy is that of someone who always worked hard, gave their best and stuck up for those who needed a cheerleader in their corner."

Williamson's mum added: "The timing is just so perfect now Milton Keynes is a city.

"So I am very proud to say that she's the first person to receive the Freedom of the City.

Barclays Women's Super League and Barclay Women's Championship clubs form working group to shape the future of the women's professional game



Pedro Soares/SPP

Representatives from the Barclays Women's Super League (WSL) clubs, Barclays Women's Championship (BWC) clubs and the FA have set up a working group to develop a long term vision and an ambitious business plan for the women's professional game in England.

The Group consists of the Senior Executives of ten BWSL and BWC clubs, and will be led by Nikki Doucet, who has been appointed by the FA as an independent consultant to facilitate the working group.

Representatives on the Working Group are;
Paul Barber OBE – Chief Executive and Deputy Chairman, Brighton and Hove Albion

Baroness Karren Brady CBE – Vice Chairman, West Ham United

Omar Berrada – Chief Football Operations Officer, Manchester City

Diane Culligan – Chairwoman and Founder, London City Lionesses

Maggie Murphy – Chief Executive, Lewes

Steve Parish – Chairman, Crystal Palace

Christian Purslow – Chief Executive, Aston Villa

Martin Semmens – Chief Executive, Southampton

Patrick Stewart – Director, Manchester United

Vinai Venkatesham – Chief Executive, Arsenal (Chair of the working group)

Dawn Airey - Chair of BWSL and BWC Board

Baroness Sue Campbell – FA Director of Women's Football

Nikki Doucet brings a wealth of global experience in the sports business, in private equity, in investment banking and as an advisor and angel investor in several UK start-ups.

She led the women's business in the UK for Nike and is passionate about working collaboratively with all stakeholders to grow the women's game.

Sky Sports, BBC and the FA player confirm broadcast picks for 2022/23 Women's Football Weekend



The Football Association is pleased to confirm that Sky Sports and BBC Sport have made their broadcast selections for Women's Football Weekend, which is set to run between 24-26 March.

The annual celebration sees the spotlight firmly placed on the women's game during the men's international break, with all six matches in the Barclays Women's Super League visible over the weekend – four of them on Sky Sports and the BBC.

The first match of the weekend will take place under the Friday night lights of Goodison Park as Everton face their Merseyside rivals Liverpool in front of the Sky cameras on 24 March. The match will kick-off at 19:30 and will be live on Sky Sports Main Event, Sky Sports Premier League, Sky Sports Football and Sky Showcase. The match will also be available on NOW TV.

The following day (Saturday 25 March) will see two live matches, starting with a north London derby at Brisbane Road as Tottenham Hotspur welcome Arsenal, kicking-off at 15:00. Later that afternoon, Old Trafford will host its second women's match of the season when Manchester United host West Ham United at 17:30. Both fixtures will be

live on Sky Sports Main Event, Sky Sports Premier League, Sky Sports Football and Sky Showcase, as well as NOW TV.

On Sunday 26 March, three more matches will take place, with BBC One the channel to watch Chelsea's visit to Manchester City. The lunch time kick-off will take place at 12.40pm at The Academy Stadium. The match will also be available on BBC iPlayer.

Also on Sunday, The FA Player will live stream Aston Villa's fixture at Villa Park against Leicester City (14:00) and Brighton & Hove Albion's match at Reading – also at 14:00 at The Select Car Leasing Stadium.

Fans overseas should check their local listings for broadcast details. Countries without a broadcast deal will see all matches available on The FA Player.

The Barclays Women's Championship has also seen two games selected for live broadcast on The FA Player for Women's Football Weekend. Sheffield United will host Lewes at Bramall Lane on Sunday 26 March at 12pm, while Southampton will welcome Bristol City to St Mary's, with the match scheduled for 14:00.



 **BARCLAYS**
WOMEN'S
SUPER LEAGUE

	Club	MP	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	Pts
1	Manchester United	14	11	2	1	38	8	30	35
2	Manchester City	14	10	2	2	30	13	17	32
3	Chelsea	12	10	1	1	35	11	24	31
4	Arsenal	12	8	2	2	27	8	19	26
5	Aston Villa	14	7	2	5	25	24	1	23
6	Everton	13	6	1	6	16	14	2	19
7	West Ham	14	5	1	8	16	24	-8	16
8	Liverpool	12	3	2	7	13	23	-10	11
9	Reading	14	3	1	10	16	30	-14	10
10	Tottenham	13	3	0	10	16	27	-11	9
11	Brighton & Hove Albion	11	2	2	7	14	39	-25	8
12	Leicester City	13	2	0	11	7	32	-25	6

Table correct as of March 5, 2022



BARCLAYS CHAMPIONSHIP

Match of the Month:

Charlton Athletic v Coventry United

Alex Hennessy scored deep into second half stoppage time as Charlton Athletic beat Coventry United 1-0 at The Oakwood in the Women's Championship. Both sides had chances before the late winner with Sian Rogers producing a fantastic save early in the second half to stop a Coventry effort. The visitors can maybe feel a bit unlucky not to come away with a point.

Karen Hills named the same starting 11 for Charlton that had beaten AFC Wimbledon 5-1 in the FA Cup in their last match. Lee Burch made three changes for Coventry from their FA Cup win over Hashtag United with Khiara Keating, Megan Alexander and Merrick Will coming in for Jodie Whiteman, Hayley Hoare and Olivia Rabjohn.

It was a sunny but cool afternoon with the pitch looking a bit dry in places. The first real chance didn't come until 15 minutes into the match but Ella Rutherford couldn't get enough on her shot and it was saved by Keating. Another 10 minutes passed before the next talking point when Charlton appealed loudly for a penalty after the ball looked to hit a Coventry United defenders hand. The referee and assistant instead gave a corner. From the corner, Ross saw her header saved.

The Addicks next chance came in the 32nd minute when Keating pushed away a shot from Angela Addison before Freda Ayisi's effort from the rebound was blocked. Coventry's first chances came a few minutes later when Mary McAteer saw her effort blocked by a Charlton defender. From the resulting corner, Freya Thomas sent a shot over from the edge of the area.

At the other end a minute later, Melissa Johnson put a shot across goal. Two minutes before half time, Rutherford put in a nice cross for the home side that was just missed by Emily Simpkins before Ayisi put the ball wide at the

far post. The visitors had the last opportunity of the first half in stoppage time but the ball bounced straight into Rogers' hands.

Coventry had the first chance of the second half just over five minutes into it. Eleanor Ryan-Doyle's shot took a deflection and Rogers made a brilliant save to tip the ball over as it was heading into the top corner. Jodie Bartle saw an effort saved from the resulting corner.

In the 57th minute, Rutherford had a shot that was saved easily by Keating. As she shot, the Charlton player went down injured and received lengthy treatment on the pitch before being stretchered off. We wish Ella Rutherford a full and speedy recovery.

The next opportunity came in the 73rd minute for Coventry when Ebony Wiseman's shot was blocked then there was a scramble on the line before play was stopped due to an injury to Rogers.

Ayisi was played through for the home side in the 81st minute but as she tried to go round Keating, the Coventry United goalkeeper got a slight touch on the ball then a couple of shots were blocked before the danger was cleared.

Rogers made two more saves in the final ten minutes or so to deny Coventry. First she kept out a close-range effort from Morgan Cross and then saved a shot from Isobel Goodwin.

12 minutes of stoppage time were signalled and in the seventh minute of them Charlton scored. A long ball forward found Ayisi in the penalty area who passed back to Hennessy and she finished first time low into the corner of the net from about 12-yards.

There was time for a couple of Charlton players to be shown yellow cards but no more opportunities for Coventry to equalise as it finished 1-0 to the Addicks.

Attendance: 556

Rutherford suffer ACL

Charlton Athletic forward Ella Rutherford has sustained an Anterior Cruciate Ligament (ACL) injury.

The 22-year-old sustained the injury during the second half of Charlton's Women's Championship match against Coventry United at the start of February.

Rutherford will now miss the rest of this season along with the early part of the 2023/24 campaign.

Emergency loan for Coventry

Goalkeeper Safia Middleton-Patel has joined Coventry United on an emergency loan deal from Manchester United.

The agreement initially covered Coventry's Women's Championship match against Blackburn Rovers on the 12th February.

Middleton-Patel started, but there is an option to extend the loan beyond the international break.

Morgan joins Sheffield United

Sheffield United have appointed Jonathan Morgan as their new head coach.

Morgan joins the club from FA Women's National League side Burnley, having managed them since the start of the 2022/23 season.

He had previously managed in and won the Women's Championship with Leicester City. After becoming the first full-time women's team head coach, Morgan said "I'm delighted to take up the opportunity" and that he is "looking forward to seeing what they can do together."

Manager of the Month announced

Sunderland Head Coach Mel Reay has been named Women's Championship Manager of the Month for January.

Reay led Sunderland to two wins out of two in the league during the month with wins over Durham and Birmingham City.

After winning the award, Reay said "We've had a really successful month in terms of results on the pitch and I think it's a reward for all the staff who work really hard behind the scenes.

"There's no stone goes unturned and the players are now putting in performances that are getting positive results which is pleasing for everyone at the football club."



Scarr wins player of the month

Sunderland forward Emily Scarr has won both the Women's Championship Player of the Month and Goal of the Month awards for January.

Sunderland won both of their league games during the month, and Scarr's header in their 3-1 win over Birmingham City was decided to be the best goal during January.

Centenary for Cusack

Maddy Cusack made her 100th appearance for Sheffield United in their Women's Championship match at Crystal Palace on the 26th February.

Cusack posted on her Twitter account that she was "proud to have made 100 appearances for Sheffield United.

"I always give my all whenever I put on this shirt, and hope there are many more to come."

Rovers sign new forward

Experienced Danish forward Camilla Kur has sign for Blackburn Rovers.

The 33-year-old has experience of playing in Denmark, the United States, Italy and Norway and has played in the UEFA Women's Champions League.

Kur also has national team experience having made ten senior appearances for Denmark.

Lambourne joins Coventry

Goalkeeper Demi Lambourne has joined Coventry United from Leicester City on an emergency loan arrangement.

The deal was for seven days between 23rd February until 2nd March.

Lambourne started Coventry's FA Cup fifth round match away to Brighton & Hove Albion which they lost 5-0.



Championship Round-up



Words: Peter Mann

Shania Hayles' ninth (league) goal of the season saw former Barclays Women's Championship leaders, **BRISTOL CITY**, regain top spot, from the London City Lionesses, when the South-West side won 1-0, away to Lewes, at the start of the month.

However, beneath the top two of Bristol (33), and London (30), it's become a series of fives as five points splits third to six, then another five separating seventh eleventh, with both of the table, Coventry United, just five off second bottom, Sheffield United.

For the returning leaders, it has been a month that, although they were dismissed from the Vitality Women's FA Cup at the hands of Manchester City, saw them bring home ten points from the twelve on offer, and concede just the once, in those four games, Lily Agg netting for London, when at Bristol, back in early February.

A goalless draw was quickly followed by the table-topping win, 3-1, at home to the Lionesses, followed by back-to-back wins over Lewes, 2-0 at home, and 1-0 away; Hayles netting in two of those successes as the goals continue to spread about.

After the win over Lewes, a hard-fought three points as the second half of the season gathers steam, City manager, Lauren Smith, spoke to the club website about the win, and what it means to be top of the pile, saying that: "It was a really tough, a real fight out there.

"Long parts of the game weren't nice to watch but I'm really pleased with how resilient the players were tonight and the emphasis was that we wanted to come away from tonight knowing where we stand.

"I'm really pleased with the three points. If we're top of the league, then people are going to want to take that away from

us and a lot of games are going to look like that between now and the end of the season.

"We're back at the top of the table and that's where we want to be, so we have to take the pressure that comes with it.

"We're not happy chasing so now that we're back at the top, we're going to do everything we can to stay there.

"It's not going to be easy; it's not going to be plain sailing and there'll be lots of changes before the end of the season – that's the type of league it is.

"It's going to be a really interesting last eight games."

LONDON CITY LIONESSES' three matches yielded two successes, and two goals for Agg, she also netting in the 3-1 win at home to Sunderland at the start of the month, Sarah Ewens also netting, the opener, in that game; whilst Southampton, sitting poised in third place, on 26 points, won two-from-two.

The Lionesses, heading into March are second to Bristol, were on thirty points, three behind the leaders, whilst the Saints are four points further back, on twenty-six points, the top three having played fourteen games thus far.

The hard-fought, 1-0 win for the Lionesses, away to Birmingham, in mid-February, Karin Maya with the only goal of the game, would see a milestone, fiftieth appearance for the club made, by Republic of Ireland international, Hayley Nolan.

Having joined the Pride back in 2020, Nolan, a defender, is one of the clubs' most improved performers (Lily Agg), and is both exceptional, and an unsung hero, of their success, her exploits often going unnoticed.

Speaking of her landmark, Nolan said: "I'm obviously buzzing.

"It wasn't as pretty as we would've liked, but it was a great team performance. We worked really hard for each other and defended the lead after we scored. I'm actually really happy for the clean sheet because we haven't had one for a while."

Nolan is the sixth member of the Pride to make 50+ appearances for the Championship high-fliers, following in the footsteps of Lily Agg, Harley Bennett, Lucy Fitzgerald, Atlanta Primus, and Shae Yanez.

SOUTHAMPTON's form, sitting third in the table and ready to pounce, continued as goals at the end of each half, from Sophia Pharoah and Ella Pusey, gave the Saints all three points in a 2-0 win at home to mid-table Crystal Palace, before a lone strike from Katie

Wilkinson, late on, saw the travelling Saints then claim the points when away to Sunderland.

During the international break, Marianne Spacey-Cale's Saints squad had a number of players away with their respective nations, three of whom were part of the young Lionesses as Kayla Rendell, Ella Morris and Paige Peake joined up for the friendlies against Belgium and Spain.

Although none were used in the U23s goalless draw with Spain, Rendell made her debut when starting in the 4-1 win over Belgium; meanwhile, Lucia Kendall played a part in both of England U19s matches, against Germany and Switzerland, whilst the two Welsh lions in the Saints squad, Megan Wynne and Alice Griffiths, were in the squad for the Pinatar Cup clash with Scotland.

The first of the two pockets of clubs beneath the top three, led by a **BIRMINGHAM CITY** side that was highlighted with a hat-trick from Jade Pennock in the Blues' 4-0 win away to Lewes, Lucy Quinn also scoring, however, a 1-0 reverse when home to London dented their promotion hopes.

CHARLTON ATHLETIC suffered a similar fate, they and Birmingham tied on 22 points each, the Addicks claiming a 97 minute winner, from Alex Hennessy, when home to Coventry United, before losing by the same score, next time out, this time away to lowly Sheffield United, in what was a rare win for the Blades.

Birmingham and Charlton played out the only, all-Championship game in the FA Cup, the Blues winning, after extra-time, thanks to a

101 minute goal from substitute Ashley Hodson.

Both sides had chances throughout, the Addicks even hitting the bar at one point, but Darren Carter's Blues made the quarter-final stage for the fourth successive season and defender, Jamie Finn, relieved to progress, said afterwards that: "The mentality has grown and each week we are getting better and better.

"To keep a clean sheet, and get a goal late on, I think it is an all-round great team performance.

"Our squad depth is huge. We need to keep pushing on now and hopefully keep on going further into this competition."

As for Karen Hills' Addicks side, it's back to the drawing board as they look to, quickly, return to winning ways, following back-to-back defeats, and aim to overtake their cup opponents, who they're level with, over the coming weeks.



Mid-table **CRYSTAL PALACE** are seeing narrow results in their matches, their two wins in February, following the defeat at Southampton, being decided by the odd goal, winning 1-0 against Durham, Annabel Blanchard netting, then a 2-1 success against the Blades, Coral-Jade Haines with the winner there, ten minutes from time.

The game for Palace, against the visiting Blades, would see all three goals arrive in the final half hour of the contest, Hollie Oulding opening the scoring for the hosts on 62, before Bex Rayner less than equalised fifteen minutes later; with the game looking like it was heading for the draw, Haines popped in the winner.

Victories over both Durham, and Sheffield United, is the first time the Eagles have won consecutive matches in some six months; victory breeds confidence, as does momentum, the Eagles having done extra training sessions over the international break.

Haines though, had only netted once this season, so her winning effort, against the Blades, was somewhat of a surprise, she saying afterwards: "I was shocked!"

"That's only my second goal this season, so it was really nice to get into the position to get shots off, but more importantly, we got three points, which I'm delighted about."

No celebrations though, it was an early night and up for work again the following day.

In the bottom half of the table, **LEWES**, who reached the quarter-finals of the FA Cup last month, with a 6-1 home win over Cardiff City, lost all

three of their league games, the Cup providing much respite for them as Ellie Mason fired a four-goal salvo to send the hosts through.

Mason's four goals in the home demolition of Cardiff was added to by further goals, in the closing minutes, from Kenzie Weir, and Aqsa Mushtaq.

Prior to their historic cup win, Rooks manager, Scott Booth, said: "I think we've learned that we have to start well in this competition, start on the front foot, be aggressive in these games, take your chances.

"I suppose that counts for every match you go into but in the cup you only get one go at it really so we're proud to be where we are but definitely want more....

"It'll be amazing to go through because it gives the club a platform that we haven't had before, and gets the clubs values out there even more.

"For the players, they get a touch of history at Lewes and it would be great to look forward to the next round and see what comes out the hat (WSL side, Manchester United, at home, was their reward for beating Cardiff City).

"It's always important to gain momentum as well, we had a little bit of it at one point, going really well and then we lost a game that we shouldn't have and that's dropped it a bit.

"We're really keen to gain that again, we have had some tough games, they've not been easy, they've been against teams at the top.

"They're always going to be competitive and you need to

play at your best and take your chances to win them.

"We look forward to the cup because it's the first time the club have got the chance to get into the next round and get the winning momentum again."

DURHAM's form meanwhile continues to stutter, Jess Clarke's late winner at home to the Blades at the start of the month was followed by the lone -goal loss to Palace, and a 5-0 cup exit at Manchester United, for whom Alessia Russo and Nikita Parris both netted late on.

Defeat for the north-east side leaves them in a perilous position, on fifteen points, only nine ahead of bottom club, Coventry, Lee Sanders' side having struggled for any real consistency all season long.

They did however have four players away on international duty, two of whom, Maria Farugia & Alex Gatt, were away with Malta, they both playing in back-to-back wins, 2-1 and 3-1, against Luxembourg; Naio-sha McAloon, who recently celebrated a year at Durham, was in Marbella for a warm weather camp with the Rep. of Ireland as they played Germany and China PR; and youngster, Ella Wilson, she made her debut for the young Lionesses as the U18s lost 2-1 to the Rep. of Ireland at St. Georges Park. B

BLACKBURN ROVERS' hard-fought, goalless draw, with high-fliers Bristol was quickly followed by defeat away to Coventry, and **SUNDERLAND**, well, the Black Cats have also misfired when losing to both London (3-1 away, Elizabetha Ejupi with a late consolation), and Southampton, and remain in the bottom three.



Rovers have seen one in, one out, in recent weeks, with defender Evie Smith joining Liverpool Feds on-loan until the end of the season, and experienced Danish forward, Camilla Kur Larsen, has joined the club from Danish outfit, Fortuna Hjørring.

Kur, albeit a 33-year-old, brings a wealth of experience to the Lancashire club as they look to pull away from the relegation battle over the coming weeks; a youth career which began in the late nineties, and a pro-career which started a decade later, she's won both league, and cup, on several occasions each, in her homeland.

Lengthy spells and both Brøndby IF, and Hjørring, have been joined by two stints stateside, with the Colorado Rapids in 2012, and the

Western New York Flash in 2015.

Meanwhile, Hannah Coan, like Nolan at the Lionesses, recently made her fiftieth appearance for her club, Coan's coming in the goalless draw at Bristol.

She said of the achievement that: "It felt really good.

"I've been playing regularly here which is has been really great for me.

"I just keep trying to develop every game and I'm really enjoying it here.....

"I obviously had a re-set when I first came here and worked really hard to prove why I should be playing.

"I think I've done that and hopefully the coaches will continue to have the confidence in me to keep playing me every week."

Meanwhile, and although it's been a tough season all-round for the Black Cats, glimmers of success are there, Emily Scarr having taken home a dual award recently, the Championship's Player of the Month, and Goal of the Month – the latter for a bullet header against Birmingham.

The Black Cats have gone through a huge chunk of the season minus several players, one of which was influential captain, Keira Ramshaw, who suffered an ankle injury in the early throes of the campaign.

Surgery though, and her rehabilitation since then, has been going well and both the player, and the club, are happy, thus far, with her progress; meanwhile, although Ramshaw hasn't played much, she's been providing input alongside the club's coaching staff.

“It’s probably my first long-term injury and I did really struggle at first but all of the girls and all of the staff are around me and that’s the Sunderland family feel,” she told the club website.

“I’m still in and around when they’re in training and I’m trying to make an impact off the pitch as well.

“Seeing the way we’re playing, you’re able to have that input and little chats off the pitch to try and get the best out of the players for the next game and for the training week so I’m just making sure that morale is kept high and everybody is feeling positive going into next game.”

With five points separating Lewes, in seventh, and **SHEFFIELD UNITED** in eleventh, the Blades picked up a valuable three points thanks to Grace Walters’ goal in the 1-0 win over Charlton, although they’ll be kicking themselves for not getting anything when away to Palace, Bex Rayner’s strike, midway through the second, was in vain as the Blades crashed to a 2-1 defeat.

The Blades meanwhile have appointed former Leicester City and Burnley boss, Jonathan Morgan, as number one, he replacing interim manager, Zoe Johnson, in mid-February (Valentine’s Day).

Stephen Bettis, United’s Chief Executive Officer, said of the appointment, that: “We are delighted to welcome Jonathan to the club and wish him every success.

“The fact that he’s our first, full-time head coach, affirms our commitment to women’s football at a very exciting time as Sheffield United look to enhance the club’s name within the women’s game.”

Meanwhile, in his first interview as new Head Coach, Morgan said, of his being appointed as their first, full-time, that: “Being in a full-time environment is something I’d have want to have kept, and is important, for me and my family.

“But, more importantly, it’s a massive indicator of where this club’s looking to go, for the players, not just the players here, now, but the future players as well, and

the younger generation, and the fact that it is a full-time commitment shows that the club is taking this game very seriously, which we know that they are.

“It gives a lot of opportunity, a lot of promise, for the next generation of girls to be a Blade, really.”

As for bottom of the table **COVENTRY UNITED**, they are just five points behind second bottom Sheffield United, and ten points from mid-table Lewes, having collected only their second win of the campaign last month, a huge, 3-1 win at home to Blackburn in the middle of the month.

Again, the basement side raced into the lead, they’ve done that a few times of late, Ebony Wiseman having them a goal up inside ten minutes, before a quick-fire brace from Isobel Goodwin, before twenty minutes was even registered, had the hosts three goals to the good; a consolation from Rovers’ Jade Richards, before the interval, competed the scoring.





 **BARCLAYS**
WOMEN'S
CHAMPIONSHIP

	Club	MP	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	Pts
1	Bristol City	15	11	3	1	26	7	19	36
2	London City Lionesses	15	9	3	3	31	13	18	30
3	Southampton	15	7	5	3	16	10	6	26
4	Birmingham City	14	8	1	5	22	15	7	25
5	Charlton	13	8	1	4	21	15	6	25
6	Crystal Palace	15	7	0	8	16	24	-8	21
7	Lewes	14	5	4	5	12	15	-3	19
8	Durham	14	5	3	6	21	18	3	18
9	Sheffield United	15	4	2	9	19	18	1	14
10	Blackburn Rovers	14	3	5	6	13	21	-8	14
11	Sunderland	15	4	1	10	17	23	-6	13
12	Coventry United	15	2	0	13	14	49	-35	6

Table correct as of March 5, 2022



THE FA NATIONAL LEAGUE

Newcastle add Reid to their ranks



Newcastle United have announced the signing of goalkeeper Hannah Reid.

The 28-year-old boasts plenty of experience, having come through the ranks at Bristol City Women, playing for Hibernian Women in her native Scotland, and also representing Durham Women.

Reid had previously been picked for Scotland's under-15s, under-17s and under-19s sides too, and arrives at Newcastle eager to impress in the famous black and white stripes.

Speaking to NUFC.co.uk, she said: "I'm motivated and excited to be involved with Newcastle and such a great squad of players and staff.

"I have immediately felt welcome, and I am inspired by the ambition. It's something I want to be part of, to help the team and club achieve collectively.

"On a personal level, my goal is to continue to develop and improve which in turn

should assist my fellow team-mates.

"I'm excited to be welcomed into another goalkeeper's union under Chris (Stygal) and work with the talented Grace (Donnelly), Ellie (Brown) and Frankie (Hackett). I look forward to the future with this group."

United Women manager Becky Langley believes Reid brings valuable experience to the club and further bolsters her squad, adding that she is excited to work with the 'keeper.

She said: "I'm delighted Hannah is joining Newcastle United Women. Her professionalism and hard work ethic has stood out from the minute I met with her.

"She's a great leader and a goalkeeper who has had international experience as well as playing at high level with Durham, Hibs and Bristol City. I'm very excited for Hannah's long term future at the club."

Hounslow withdraw from the league

The FA Women's National League have announced that Hounslow Women have withdrawn from the league.

The statement said: "League tables have been amended accordingly. The #FAWNLfamily wish all associated with the club the very best for the future."

Hounslow were allowed to start the season late due to a struggle to get players but have continued struggling throughout the season.

One fan on Twitter said: "Sad to hear but in truth might be the best thing for them. Huge credit to them and their players for continuing to work through difficulties since QPR stitched them up. Hopefully they can recover and go again at a level suitable and affordable to them."

Laura Bright announces retirement

MK Dons captain Laura Bright has announced her sad decision to retire following injury.

In a statement she said: "I have been lucky to have played alongside and against some talented players, for some great managers and won a fair few trophies along the way.

"My greatest honour and proudest moment in my career was being made captain of MK Dons. The club that felt like home and gave me my happiest memories. It is such a special club with some of the best people I've met in football and I hope I've helped to play a small part in setting the foundations for an exciting future.

"Being stretchered off wasn't how I envisaged my last moment on the pitch but not being physically able to play was probably the only way I would ever stop. At least we won and got a clean sheet in my final game.

"Thank you to everyone who has played their part in my career and thank you to those of you who have supported me over the last 12 months with two operations, complications, endless rehab and the news that my knee can no longer stand the impact of football.

"A final thank you to my Dad who helped shape the mentality that influenced my whole career, who drove me to be better and was by my side throughout."

Rowlands joins Swindon Town

Charlie Rowlands has signed for Swindon Town from Forest Green Rovers.

Rowlands is Forest Green Rovers current top goalscorer with 9 goals in 14 games in their promotion push to FA Women's National League.

Having fallen out of favour in recent weeks First Team Manager, James Lally, moved swiftly to try and capture her signature.

Lally stated "When an opportunity to bring in another goal scorer is there you need to consider it. While we have a number of goal scorers in the side, having another striker with a proven track record will help us push onwards and give me different options."

FANWNL

2022/23 Tables

Northern Premier Division

	P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
1 Nottingham Forest	15	12	1	2	41	37
2 Burnley	14	10	4	0	27	34
3 Wolverhampton Wanderers	14	10	2	2	27	32
4 Derby County	16	10	2	4	18	32
5 Brighouse Town	17	7	5	5	6	26
6 Stoke City	16	6	2	8	-8	20
7 Huddersfield Town	14	5	3	6	-2	18
8 West Bromwich Albion	14	4	4	6	-6	16
9 Liverpool Feds	16	4	3	9	-15	15
10 AFC Fylde	15	3	5	7	-27	14
11 Boldmere St. Michaels	15	3	1	11	-22	10
12 Loughborough Lightning	16	0	2	14	-39	2

Southern Premier Division

	P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
1 Oxford United	15	11	3	1	28	36
2 Ipswich Town	16	11	2	3	19	35
3 Portsmouth	16	11	1	4	19	34
4 Watford	14	9	2	3	22	29
5 Billericay Town	17	7	2	8	-3	23
6 Milton Keynes Dons	14	6	2	6	2	20
7 Gillingham	15	6	2	7	-2	20
8 Cheltenham Town	16	6	2	8	-11	20
9 Plymouth Argyle	15	5	0	10	-15	15
10 London Bees	16	4	2	10	-19	14
11 Bridgwater United	16	3	4	9	-8	13
12 Crawley Wasps	16	1	4	11	-32	7

Tables correct as of March 5, 2023



TheFA Women's
National League

FANWNL

2022/23 Tables

Division One North

	P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
1 Durham Cestria	17	14	2	1	31	44
2 Newcastle United	15	12	1	2	25	37
3 Barnsley	15	10	2	3	17	32
4 Stockport County	17	8	4	5	9	28
5 Hull City	15	7	3	5	10	24
6 Middlesborough	17	6	2	9	-10	20
7 Leeds United	12	6	1	5	9	19
8 York City	17	5	2	10	-8	17
9 Norton & Stockton	16	4	5	7	-10	17
10 Chorley	17	4	3	10	-17	15
11 Bradford City	16	4	0	12	-19	12
12 Merseyrail	18	1	5	12	-37	8

Division One Midlands

	P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
1 Stourbridge	13	11	1	1	40	34
2 Doncaster Rovers Belles	14	10	1	3	20	31
3 Sporting Khalsa	17	9	2	6	13	29
4 Solihull Moors	15	7	5	3	20	26
5 Northampton Town	14	7	2	5	18	23
6 Peterborough United	13	7	2	4	12	23
7 Leafield Athletic	17	6	4	7	-1	22
8 Lincoln City	17	6	1	10	0	19
9 Sheffield	14	6	1	7	-1	19
10 Wem Town	16	5	2	9	-9	17
11 Leek Town	17	4	5	8	-11	17
12 Long Eaton United	17	1	0	16	-101	3

Tables correct as of March 5, 2023



TheFA Women's
National League

FANWNL

2022/23 Tables

Division One South East

	P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
1 Hashtag United	12	10	1	1	37	31
2 AFC Wimbledon	12	9	2	2	23	29
3 London Seaward	13	8	1	1	5	25
4 Norwich City	12	6	2	2	-4	20
5 Actonians	12	6	1	1	15	19
6 Ashford Town (Middlesex)	13	6	1	1	1	19
7 Queens Park Rangers	11	4	3	3	-1	15
8 Cambridge United	13	2	4	4	-7	10
9 Chesham United	12	2	0	0	-45	6
10 Cambridge City	14	1	1	1	-24	4
X Hounslow	X	X	X	X	X	X
X Wymondham Town	X	X	X	X	X	X

Division One South West

	P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
1 Exeter City	17	14	1	2	47	43
2 Cardiff City	15	13	0	2	57	39
3 AFC Bournemouth	18	10	3	5	26	33
4 Moneyfields	15	9	4	2	22	31
5 Southampton Women	14	9	1	4	29	28
6 Swindon Town	14	7	2	5	0	23
7 Selsey	15	6	0	9	0	18
8 Porishead Town	15	6	0	9	-21	18
9 Keynsham Town	15	5	0	10	-29	15
10 Maidenhead United	15	4	1	10	-20	13
11 Larkhill Athletic	17	3	0	14	-28	9
12 AFC St Austell	16	1	0	15	-63	3

Tables correct as of March 5, 2023



TheFA Women's
National League



GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL

Army FA Announces First Ever Corporate Sponsor for its Women's Football Corps Leagues



The Army FA today announced the first ever corporate sponsor of its Women's Football Corps Leagues.

The deal with F5, a multi-cloud app and cybersecurity specialist, includes support for all eight women's teams, as well as the Cpl Channing Day League (League One), the Lily Parr League (League Two) and the Edwards Cup. F5 branding will now appear on team shirts, match balls and pre-match publications.

"We are delighted to announce our new sponsorship with F5, which is a major boost to all eight of our female football teams" said Capt Caitlin Lower, Secretary for women's football in the Army.

"The deal is also important for women's football in general. Support and enthusiasm are now at an all-time high, so it is vital to continue investing in the grassroots of the game. The more visibility we have, the more we can inspire others to take part. This is a particularly powerful mission

for us, as Army Football has a strong focus on creating links with the community on both a regional and national scale."

F5's sponsorship comes as momentum for women's football continues to pick up pace following the Lionesses' Euro 2021 triumph.

According to recent FA statistics, attendance for the Women's Super League is up 227% on last season. This is also mirrored by the attendance of the Barclays Women's Championship, which is up 86%.

From June to December last year, there was also a 15% increase in female youth teams, with interest in women's football up 12% amongst girls aged 5-16 in England.

However, only 63% of schools offer girls equal access to football in PE lessons, meaning more than a third are not getting the same opportunity to play the sport as boys.

"F5 is immensely proud to support women's football in the army," said Kristina

Wiktander, VP for North and West EMEA at F5.

"Promoting female role models and success is hugely important to F5 as a business, and myself personally, so we look forward to seeing the impact of our collaboration throughout the season."

The eight teams covered by F5's sponsorship include the Intelligence Corps, Royal Signals, Royal Engineers, Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME), Army Medical Services (AMS), Adjutant General's Corps (AGC), Royal Artillery and Royal Logistic Corps (RLC).

Established in 1888, the Army FA is a not-for-profit governing body committed to offering opportunities for everyone in the Army to be involved with football.

More than a quarter of the Army's strength – 15,000 soldiers – participate from unit through to representative level. 85% of the Army's unit structure affiliate to play the game via male and female leagues situated throughout the United Kingdom.

Over 200k girls signed up to take part in Biggest Ever Football Session on IWD



On Wednesday 8 March – International Women’s Day - over 200,000 schoolgirls are set to take part in The FA and Barclays’ second Biggest Ever Football Session, as part of the Let Girls Play campaign.

A record-breaking number of primary and secondary schools have signed up to deliver football sessions on the day and affirm their commitment to providing girls with equal access to football.

Last year, 90,000 girls took part in the inaugural Biggest Ever Football Session, and after an incredible year for women’s football, with England winning the UEFA Women’s EURO 2022 tournament, the number of registered girls has more than doubled this year.

Media events in London, Birmingham and Manchester will feature key FA spokespeople including Director of Women’s Football, Baroness Sue Campbell, and Head of Development, Louise Gear.

Also in attendance will be Barclays football ambassadors, Kelly Smith, and Ian Wright as lead partners of the event. In total over 1,200 primary and secondary school girls will take part in the media events across the country.

The Let Girls Play campaign was launched in October 2021 to support The FA’s strategic ambition to provide girls with equal access to football.

The campaign is supported by Barclays as part of its record-breaking investment in women’s and girls’ football and long-standing commitment to the sport.

To find out more about the campaign and sign up to the Biggest Ever Football Session go to: www.englandfootball.com/LetGirlsPlay.

To join the movement via social media, follow Facebook, Instagram and Twitter using #LetGirlsPlay.

In conversation with...

Amelia Hooper



This month we chat to Football Business and Media Student Amelia Hooper.

Hooper is currently studying at UCFB and is aiming to crack into the world of football as a career.

With a long love of football and travel, there only ever seemed one way in which her career would get her and despite working part time alongside her degree and work experience, she is determined to make it.

Here is what she had to say.

It would be great to start with a bit of background about yourself.

Absolutely. My name is Amelia Hooper, I am currently in my second year at UCFB. At the moment I am not working in the industry but I am about to start some voluntary work in a radio station called 'Thurrock Community Radio Station' and I am waiting to see where it goes from there.

Do you have a specific area of the industry which you would like to get into?

I definitely want to do something media related, I am not too sure what yet whether it will be behind or in front of the cameras. We are doing a lot of coursework where we get to do a bit of both. I have just done a piece where

I am recording in front of the camera but we have not done anything yet behind the camera so I am waiting to see which I prefer when I have had chance to try it.

What got you into a love of football and wanting to following it as a career path?

I never really knew what I wanted to do growing up and then I heard about UCFB when I was in Year 9 and 10. I am a Chelsea supporter myself. I started going to games with my dad when I was little. As soon as I heard about UCFB, I knew that was where I wanted to go.

What is it like at UCFB?

I am really enjoying it. One of things that made me want to go there was that it was always very big on getting you a job at the end of it. Now we are getting towards the end of our second year, they are very good at pushing people to get placements and are always telling us about jobs in the industry.

What's been your highlight so far?

I enjoyed doing a piece to camera for my TV studio and production assignment. After Easter we are doing a live TV show and we will find out our roles soon. There will be a group of 12 of us pulling together to produce it. I am really looking forward to that. I love the practical side of things.

If you could give someone interested in UCFB any advice what would it be?

I would advise people to go to as many events as they can. They have a lot of things on a Wednesday with guest speakers and also constantly look at Job Teaser which UCFB use. Women's football is also such a great place to start. It is becoming hugely popular now and there are many opportunities to work within the women's game.

We wish Amelia all the luck with her course and career.

FA to discover 'New Generation' with revamped women's and girls' player pathway



The Football Association has announced a new look Women's and Girls' Player Pathway to unearth the very best talent in England while also making the game more diverse, accessible and inclusive.

The transformation of the pathway will increase the number of players and coaches entering high-quality training environments and will ensure every talented girl from any part of the country will be given the best opportunity to fulfil her full potential for club or country.

Following an extensive consultation period across the game, the new structure sees up to 70 Emerging Talent Centres (ETCs) established across the country catering for players aged 8-16 who show footballing potential. Since July 2022, 56 ETCs have now launched, with a further 11 confirmed to follow in the coming months, replacing the

existing 28 Regional Talent Centres (RTCs) and 10 Advanced Coaching Centres (ACCs).

The changes will see 95% of players accessing an ETC within one hour of where they live by 2024 and the number of young female players engaged in FA talent programmes across the country rise from 1,722 to more than 4,200 by the end of the 2023/24 season.

With the new format the ETCs will have approximately 560 Technical staff, compared to approximately 350 with the RTCs and ACCs.

The latest development in the pathway will now see the launch of a new programme for clubs in the Barclays Women's Super League and Barclays Women's Championship, known as FA Professional Game Academies (PGAs). Developed in collaboration with the clubs, they will come to fruition in the 2023/24

season and will cater for the development of talented players between the ages of 14 to 20.

The PGAs will replace the current FA WSL Academies and will improve the readiness of players coming out of the pathway to compete at first team domestic and international level. FA funding will be focused on two age groups for Category 1 clubs and one age group for Category 2 clubs.

Clubs will also have the flexibility to develop their own age groups that supports clubs' philosophy, ambition and resource.

Kay Cossington, The FA's Women's Technical Director, said: "We have a responsibility to ensure that every young girl who wants to have a career in football has a clear pathway to doing so.

"These changes ensure more focused investment and will address some of the historic

challenges many different age groups have faced when trying to access the game. We strive for our game to be more reflective of wider society and making our game more diverse, inclusive and accessible is the central ambition to the restructure of our pathway.

“With more opportunities and a better geographic spread, we are incredibly confident that this will inspire a new generation of Lionesses to flourish and evolve our game for the future.”

The restructured pathway will see opportunities for talented players at different ages and stages:

Emerging Talent Centres

- The entry point for talented players. A maximum of 70 centres for players with potential aged 8-16.
- Funded by The FA and The Premier League

Club Funded Programme

- Clubs have the flexibility to develop their youth programmes to fit with their philosophy and structure.
- Programmes are funded by the club.

Pro Game Academies

- Focused upon the development of players aged 14-20 for senior football.
- Funded by The FA and the club

Supported by investment from the Premier League, the ETCs will offer increased playing time, varied football formats and allow players to play for both an ETC and a grassroots club, school, or representative

team, which is intended to enhance the variety of playing experiences. This will include an emphasis on girls joining boys in a mixed football environment to aid their development.

The pathway will form a part of The FA’s wider approach to identifying and developing talented female players.

The FA last year launched its exciting programme Discover My Talent, which is working to identify talent regardless of their geographical location, background or the community they live in. Of the thousands of referrals being made through Discover My Talent, 320 players have been identified as a real talent of interest, whilst 75 are now in the final stages of selection for England Teams between the age of U15–U17.

This work has been supported by Sport England and UEFA Hattrick funding and is a step-change in how talent is unearthed.

The new structure comes as a result of a three-year Player Pathway Review to assess the existing structure and to ensure that it is able to provide a wide and diverse pool of players ready for senior football.

Relevant stakeholders including players, parents, coaches, and clubs were all engaged, as well as considering research, data, and insight to identify the future direction.



Schools Football Week: Football at Stormont School



Stormont School has made huge strides in creating opportunities for girls to play football, our national sport.

With football now officially the biggest female team sport in England, to help lift the profile of the sport within the school we wholeheartedly embraced this year's ESFA Schools' Football week. All girls, from Reception to Year 6, took part in football activities throughout the week with football delivered in all curriculum PE lessons. We also welcomed some very special guest coaches into Stormont! As an Independent girls' school, we feel it important for our girls to have co-ed experiences and so invited Lochinver House School, a neighbouring boys' school, to come and join some of our ESFA celebrations.

We kicked off the celebrations with former Arsenal and England player, and current Arsenal U18 coach, Jack Wilshere, leading a coaching session on Wednesday 8th February, inspiring our Year 5 girls. It was a fantastic session enjoyed out in the sunshine on our school field.

Jack told our girls to 'Enjoy whatever sport you choose to

do. If you enjoy it, you'll work harder.' With football-themed cookies made on site by our catering team to close the session it really was a day our girls are certain to remember for many years to come.

On Thursday 9th February, we welcomed Kieran Richardson in to school. As a former Manchester United and England player, he inspired all of our girls in Year 4 and Year 6. Kieran ran through some of the warm-up activities and passing drills he would often do and offered lots of advice to our keen footballers.

In a question and answer session we learned lots of valuable information regarding training, commitment, contract decisions and Kieran's first shirt number. We also importantly learned, thanks to a question from a Year 4 girl, that Kieran's favourite ice-cream flavour is mint choc chip! It was enormous fun and I am sure his eldest daughter in Year 6 will never forget the day she played in a football match against both her mum and dad in school!

'It is important for girls to play football because we are just as powerful and inspirational as

men and the Lioness' prove it!' – Arabella D, Year 5.

'We now play football at break time and lunch time and it's great fun.' Emma D, Year 6

'It's important girls learn football at school as it's mostly men we are shown on the TV playing it.' River R, Year 6.

We are attending our first U11 Football tournament this month and have other friendly games pencilled in for the rest of term. With football on the up here at Stormont, we are thrilled to have a number of girls now joining teams outside of school with one scouted and invited to train with Watford FC.

Our ESFA School's football week closed with a number of our girls entering The Women's Football Magazine Design competition, designing a new front cover for the April edition. A really fun initiative that got many of our girls very excited. Thank you TWFM, for promoting football for women and girls and helping us inspire the next generation.

Mrs M Kirbyshire-Rowe

Head of PE





CUP COMPETITIONS

FA Cup: Shock results and record-breaking



By Paul Donegan

The FA Cup fifth round took place on Sunday 26th February and it didn't disappoint, well apart from there weren't any shocks. Plenty of goals scored of which some were spectacular, there were two penalty shoot-outs, two players scored four goals, a side reached the quarter-finals for the first time in their history and the record winners of the cup exited it for this season. The winners in this round received £20,000 in prize money whilst those that lost got £5,000. Here is my round up of what happened in the eight ties.

Lewes v Cardiff City

I was at The Dripping Pan to watch Women's Championship side Lewes take on Cardiff City. Cardiff were the only FA Women's National League and amateur side remaining in the cup. The tier 4 side had already won five matches to reach this stage, beating Downend Flyers 10-0, Bridgwater United 4-0, Keynsham Town 6-0, Bournemouth Sports 5-0 and Burnley 4-1. Lewes had beaten London Bees 5-0 in the third round then narrowly overcame Ipswich Town 1-0 to reach this stage.

Cardiff brought a large travelling contingent with them, lots wearing the clubs bobble hats and scarfs, and they made a fair bit of noise throughout the match. The Lewes supporters had a drum and there was a good atmosphere inside ground.

Lewes opened the scoring in the 5th minute when the ball rebounded to Ellie Mason who smashed it into the net.

The home side had opportunities to extend their lead but a header from a free kick went just wide four minutes later, and Paula Howells sent a long range dipping effort over the crossbar in the 26th minute.

Mason did make it 2-0 to Lewes in the 28th minute when after being played through she finished low past Cardiff goalkeeper Laura O'Sullivan.

Rebecca McKenna sent a shot into the side netting, and minutes later Emma Thompson hit the woodwork as Lewes looked to score a third. O'Sullivan made a good save with her legs to deny Lewes in the 41st minute then Mason shot over from inside the area.

Cardiff scored in first half stoppage time to halve the deficit, and what a spectacular goal it was!

ruled out for offside in the opening 15 minutes of the second half. Kirsty Barton then saw a couple of efforts go wide for the home side.

Lewes did go 3-1 ahead in the 61st minute when Mason completed her hat-trick with a low shot into the corner of the goal.

Cardiff did have a chance to get a goal back in the 67th minute but Whitehouse made a good save to deny them.

Mason saw an effort go wide in the 74th minute, then two minutes later she scored her and Lewes' fourth when she controlled the ball then volleyed it in.

McKenna, who I thought had a really good game down the right side for Lewes, set up Thompson but her shot was saved in the 84th minute. It was then announced that Mason was Player of the Match and that the attendance was 857.

Lewes scored their final two goals late in the game with Kenzie Weir and Aqsa Mushtaq getting them. There was still time for the home side to hit the woodwork again before the final whistle was blown. The 6-1 win sees Lewes reach the quarter-finals for the first time in their history.

Round-up of the rest of the fifth round



Holders Chelsea took on 14-times winners Arsenal in an all Women's Super League (WSL) tie at Kingsmeadow. Arsenal had chances before Chelsea took the lead in the 21st minute when Sophie Ingle scored. Ann-Katrin Berger made a few good saves for the Blues during the first half. Sam Kerr, on her 100th appearance for Chelsea, scored their second goal in the 56th minute. Chelsea's 2-0 win means they have now beaten Arsenal in the FA Cup in the last three seasons.

There were two other all WSL ties and both went to penalties. West Ham United and Aston Villa couldn't be separated after 120 minutes at the Chigwell Construction Stadium with the score level at 1-1. Rachel Daly gave the away side the lead in the 50th minute before Dagny Brynjarsdottir equalised for the Hammers in second half stoppage time. There were no goals during extra time so it went to a penalty shoot-out. Both goalkeepers took penalties with Hannah Hampton scoring for Villa then Mackenzie Arnold missed for West Ham which meant the Villans won after spot kicks 7-6 and made it through to the quarter-finals.

At Brisbane Road, Tottenham Hotspur played Reading. Both sides had chances but it finished 0-0 after 120 minutes had been played. Reading won the shoot-out 5-4 with Lauren Wade scoring the decisive spot kick to send them through. The Royals have won both their FA Cup ties on penalties this season after defeating Leicester in a shoot-out in the fourth round.

Both Manchester clubs had convincing wins against Championship opposition. Manchester United played Durham at home and won 5-0. The first goal didn't come until the 42nd minute when Vilde Boe Risa scored direct from a free kick. Leah Galton, Hannah Blundell, Alessia Russo and Nikita Parris scored during the second half for United.

Manchester City beat Bristol City 8-1 away from home. Khadija Shaw scored four of the goals with the others coming from Ingrid Angeldahl (a cracking effort into the top corner), Julie Blakstad (2) and Jemima Dahou, who scored her first senior goal for the club. Gracie Pearse scored the Robins consolation goal. A great attendance of 1,223 watched this one at the Robins High Performance Centre.

Brighton & Hove Albion beat Coventry United 5-0 at the Broadfield Stadium in another WSL vs Championship tie. Brianna Visalli and Lee Geum-Min scored two each for the Seagulls and the other was an own goal from Fran Orthodoxou as the South coast side comfortably made it through.

After causing a shock by beating WSL side Everton in the previous round, Birmingham City were drawn away to fellow Championship side Charlton Athletic in the fifth round. The only goal came in extra-time with Birmingham's Ashley Hodson scoring it to send the Blues through to the last eight.

Fifth Round results

West Ham United 1 v 1 Aston Villa
(Aston Villa won 7-6 on penalties)

Manchester United 5 v 0 Durham

Charlton Athletic 0 v 1 Birmingham City
(after extra time)

Lewes 6 v 1 Cardiff City

Tottenham Hotspur 0 v 0 Reading
(Reading won 5-4 on penalties)

Chelsea 2 v 0 Arsenal

Brighton & Hove Albion 5 v 0 Coventry United

Bristol City 1 v 8 Manchester City

Quarter-finals draw

The draw for the quarter-finals has been made.

These ties are due to be played on the weekend of 18th/19th March (check FA website/clubs social media for kick-off times and locations).

Reading v Chelsea

Aston Villa v Manchester City

Lewes v Manchester United

Birmingham City v Brighton & Hove Albion

2022/23 Vitality Women's FA Cup final passes 40,000

The FA is pleased to confirm that over 40,000 tickets have now been issued for this season's Vitality Women's FA Cup Final.

The showpiece event, which will be held on Sunday 14 May at Wembley Stadium Connected by EE, has seen over 10,000 tickets issued in the last five weeks since the 30k mark was reached, highlighting the appetite fans have for the match, with the Finalists due to be confirmed in April.

A record 49,094 fans witnessed Chelsea's victory over Manchester City in last year's Final, with both clubs still in the competition following this past weekend's Fifth Round.

Category Pricing

Category 1 - £30

Category 2 - £25

Category 3 - £15

Concession (OAP/Student) - £10

Junior (Under 16) - £5

Group Adult (9+) - £15



Match of the Month: Conti Cup final



By Helen Rowe-Willcocks

Arsenal came from behind to beat Chelsea in the Continental Tyres League Cup final to win their first trophy in four years.

Having lost 2-0 to Chelsea in the FA Cup last weekend, Arsenal had the worst possible start on Sunday when Kerr's header snuck in under the crossbar to kick-start a mouth-watering final.

Jonas Eidevall's side trailed within two minutes when Sam Kerr headed Chelsea in front but the Gunners responded and were much the better side at Selhurst Park.

Striker Stina Blackstenius calmly slotted in the equaliser after Kerr's opener, before Arsenal captain Kim Little netted from the penalty spot to make it 2-1.

The Gunners continued to dominate, although the combination of Kerr and midfielder Guro Reiten provided an ongoing threat for Chelsea, and Eidevall's side extended their lead on the stroke of half-time when the ball deflected off Blues defender Niamh Charles and into her own net from a corner.

Chelsea manager Emma Hayes made several tactical changes throughout the match but her side could not find a way back into the game as Arsenal saw out the win.

It is a huge result for Arsenal and coach Eidevall, who has won his first trophy with the club and ended a significant period without silverware for a side who had previously dominated English women's football.

There were jubilant scenes at full-time as Arsenal's players ran hand-in-hand to their supporters to celebrate as 'Sweet Caroline' rang out at Selhurst Park, where the 19,010 in attendance beat the 8,004 record set at last year's final.

Speaking to BBC One after the game, Eidevall said: "These are the games we want to be in going forward.

"To get results creates belief.

"It was really important to get that reward and now we can be filled with belief for all the games going forward."

Speaking after the match Hayes did not hold back in her assessment of the game calling it a 'reality check'.

"The blistering start killed us - we sat off when they got the first goal. The difference

was between a team that has won a lot and a team that hasn't.

“They won the duels, they were at a better intensity than us.

“The best team won there's no doubt.”

She added on BBC: “I'm disappointed with us - you can't concede three goals against a team that haven't won a lot, which they haven't domestically. They wanted it more.”

“You have to win your battles and we didn't do that, they dominated.

“Kim Little deservedly Player of the Match. When you don't do those things sometimes you need a reality check and the better team won today.

“There was complacency today - we won a lot and they haven't and today they wanted it more than us. Simple as.

“The best team won, I'm disappointed with us because I think for a Chelsea team, our standards are higher than that.”

Stats:

Possession: 50% v 50%

Shots: 8 v 14

Shots on target: 4 v 5

Corners: 8 v 3

Fouls: 11 v 12





HOME NATIONS

England book London double-header with Australia



Ane Frosaker/SPP

England will have a unique international double this year with both women's and men's teams going head-to-head against Australia in London.

On Tuesday 11 April (7.45pm kick-off), the Lionesses will welcome the Matildas to Brentford for an Alzheimer's Society International before the Socceroos travel to take on the Three Lions at Wembley Stadium connected by EE on Friday 13 October (7.45pm kick-off).

The FA announced a two-year charity partnership with Alzheimer's Society in August 2021. The high-profile women's fixture against Australia, raising vital funds and awareness, follows on from a notable men's match dedicated to the same good cause last year.

In between the two Australia matches, Sarina Wiegman's squad will head Down Under in July for the FIFA Women's World Cup Australia and New Zealand 2023.

England women have not played against Australia since October 2018 when Fran Kirby scored in a 1-1 draw at Craven Cottage, Fulham.

April will be another busy month for Wiegman. Before the Australia date, she will lead the EURO winners against South

American champions Brazil in the Finalissima 2023 at a sold-out Wembley on Thursday 6 April.

England women's head coach Sarina Wiegman said: "We are always looking for different challenges and we are really happy to play two more strong non-European teams in Brazil and Australia in April. They will both be competitive at the World Cup, and Australia will give everything to impress because they are going into a home tournament with big expectation. They will want to show they are in good shape for the finals.

"We know Australia have players at the highest level, so for us it is another opportunity to see where we stand in our preparation for the World Cup. It will also be very special to play them at Brentford as it was a great EURO stadium. We want to create more excitement for our fans as we prepare for what we hope will be another memorable summer."

Tickets for England Women v Australia at the Gtech Community Stadium will go on sale from 12pm on Tuesday 21 February exclusively for My England Football members, with general sale from 3pm on Wednesday 22 February. Visit [TheFA.com/tickets](https://www.thefa.com/tickets) for more.

Invitational Internationals: The Arnold Clark Cup and Other Trophies



By Clare McEwen

A Mexican wave rippled through the 20,000-strong crowd at Stadium MK as the Lionesses began the defence of the Arnold Clark Cup this year. My family and I were there, right behind the goal for their opener against the Republic of Korea. And it turned out to be a great place to watch from: over the two games, five out of seven goals were scored in 'our' goal.

The pitch may not have been up to scratch but the atmosphere was fantastic. Adorned with Arnold Clark foam fingers and yellow sunglasses, the crowd were vocal throughout. Families enjoyed the double-header spectacle, and young girls were eager to see their role models. And it wasn't only the girls. My son (who's 11) was equally as excited to see the stars take to the field (as was I!).

I love the double-header format of this competition and there was plenty to enjoy for

the neutral in the opener between Italy and Belgium. Entertaining as it was though, most of us were obviously there for the Lionesses. They didn't disappoint. Four goals (although some may have missed Chloe Kelly's strike within 30 seconds of the restart), four goal scorers, and a clean sheet for Mary Earps - I don't think the evening could have finished any better.

Sarina Weigman switched things around for the second match against Italy, giving opportunities to many of the youngsters. Katie Robinson got her first England start (and provided Rachel Daly with an assist), and Jess Park and Maya Le Tissier got their second caps. Many of the regular starters got a rest. Ellie Roebuck played in goal, Alex Greenwood led the team out as captain, and both Daly and Katie Zelem got the honour of wearing the captain's armband during the game. Different starting 11, same result: another win.

What can I say about the final game against Belgium? Another Lionesses attacking masterclass. Kelly was on fire (winning the golden boot), Lauren James was phenomenal (winning player of the tournament), and even at 5-0 up they never stopped trying to score another one. A brief lapse at the back denied Earps another clean sheet - it was a cracking strike though - but fuelled them onto another goal. The 6-1 win ensured they retained the Arnold Clark trophy. Ahead of the summer, the rest of the footballing world will be trying to work out how to stop the Lionesses roar.

When founded in 2022, the purpose of the tournament was to give England more international games. This would enable Sarina Weigman to regularly test her squad against top class opposition whilst generating interest in the women's game, broadening the fanbase, and increasing grassroots participation from young girls. In its first two

years, it has ticked all those boxes. This year's competition has seen more goals (23), more opportunities for young England players, and record-breaking crowds. Children designed banners to support their favourite players and the Lionesses reciprocated with applause, autographs and selfies at the end of matches. So far, the Arnold Clark Cup and the Lionesses have formed the perfect partnership.

Other Invitational Tournaments

The Arnold Clark Cup may be a newcomer to the international calendar, but invitational tournaments have been instrumental in allowing women's teams to compete against other nations since women started playing football. There are many tournaments that run at this time of year, providing opportunities to prepare for major competitions, test out squads and get more game time.

The following invitational tournaments all took/take place in February.

SheBelieves Cup



Set up in 2016, this United States (US) tournament was founded to encourage young women to reach for and

achieve their dreams. Four teams compete each year and the US have won five times, with England (2019) and France (2017) winning once each.

This year's competition between US, Canada, Brazil and Japan finished, once more, with the US as winners - winning all three of their games and scoring five goals.

The Algarve Cup

The long running Algarve Cup has been held in Portugal since 1994. Twelve teams compete, and Sweden are the current champions, winning their fifth title in 2022. The US have been the most successful team with ten titles. Norway have won it five times, whilst Germany have won four titles.

It wasn't held this year because Portugal were still involved in World Cup qualification play-off matches. They've now secured their place for Australia and New Zealand in the summer.

Pinatar Cup

Founded in 2020 in Spain, the Pinatar Cup hosts four teams in a round robin format. Belgium won in 2022 and Scotland won the only other previous edition in 2020 (it was cancelled in 2021 because of you-know-what).

Iceland won this year's event with Wales finishing second, Scotland third, and the Philippines fourth.

Cyprus Women's Cup

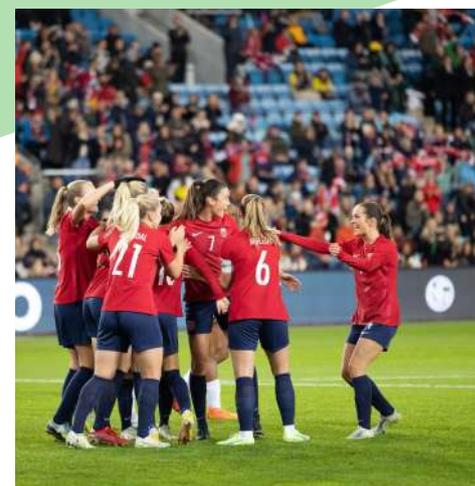
This tournament has been held annually in Cyprus since 2008. Unusually, the host nation has yet to take part in it! Previously, 12 teams played but this year only four were involved: Finland, Romania,

Hungary, and Croatia. It has been missing from the calendar for a couple of years, last being won by Croatia in 2020. This year's winners were Finland, taking 3-points in every game.

Turkish Women's Cup

This annual event is held in Alanya, Turkey, and began in 2017. Teams from four continents - Europe, South America, Africa, and Asia- take part. The France B team has won it twice but didn't compete this year. Kosovo beat eleven other competitors to the 2023 title.

Tournoi de France



Played in France since 2020, this is another four-teamed, round robin contest. France have won all three titles, including another one this year. Denmark, Norway and Uruguay also competed in 2023.

There were plenty of opportunities for national sides to test their squads this winter, ahead of the World Cup. Last year's Arnold Clark Cup win helped Weigman craft her squad into European Champions, could this year's victory lead to something even bigger... dare to dream.

Player Profile: Millie Bright



By Clare McEwen

Millie Bright was a rock at the back for the Lionesses in the summer, but she didn't start her career as a defender.

She joined Killamarsh Dynamos (in Derbyshire) when she was nine having watching her friend play. Whilst there, Millie was scouted by nearby Sheffield United. She joined their academy at 16-years-old, becoming a prolific striker. She was then spotted by Doncaster Belles, who signed her in 2009.

Millie made her debut as a striker for Doncaster against Watford in August 2009, scoring her first goal in her first start in September. She was awarded a Football Association WSL (FAWSL) contract in 2011 - the first WSL season.

To secure more game time, Millie went to Leeds United on loan for 2011-12. Returning to the Belles for the following season, she became a regular starter. In 2014, she moved from striker and began to play in either midfield or defence.

Chelsea signed her in 2015, initially playing her in midfield alongside Katie Chapman. In her first year, she made her Champions League debut, 14 appearances, and was named Chelsea Players' Player of the Year by her teammates. Chelsea finished top of the WSL and won the FA Cup - Millie had her first major silverware.

Chelsea used Bright's versatility to full effect in 2016, playing her in midfield, at centre-half and at full-back. She started all 16 games and was again voted Chelsea Players' Player of the Year. She added Young Player of the Year too.

Having played for England at youth level, Bright got her senior call-up in 2016. Her first cap came

in September, playing in midfield. Later that year she was named Young England Player of the Year.

Millie was now a defender for Chelsea, helping them concede only five goals in all competitions in 2017/18. She started 33 games, more than any other Chelsea player, becoming undroppable. Consequently, the Blues defence was the tightest in the WSL.

In 2018/19 Millie moved permanently to the centre of defence. Whilst playing alongside Steph Houghton for England, she helped them reach the semi-finals of the 2019 World Cup.

Bright scored a long-range wonder goal to start Chelsea's 2020/21 campaign before settling into defence alongside Magda Erikksen: helping them keep 25 clean sheets. Chelsea reached their first Champions League final, and Bright was selected in the FIFA FIFPro Women's World 11 - chosen by professional players around the world.

In 2021, Millie captained her country for the first time and scored her first England goal.

She started 39 games for Chelsea in 2021/22, captained 16 times and made her 200th appearance for the club. She was named in the PFA Team of the Year, the Women's World 11; and she won the FA Cup and the Euros!

She has won five WSL titles, three FA Cups, two league cups and the Community Shield with Chelsea, and the 2022 UEFA Women's Championship, the Arnold Clark Cup (twice), and the European Championships with England. What a trophy cabinet!

Lionesses legends present England squad with legacy caps



The England squad have prepared for their Arnold Clark Cup defence by receiving commemorative legacy caps and numbers in a special ceremony at St. George's Park.

On the eve of tomorrow's match with Korea Republic in Milton Keynes, Sarina Wiegman invited four Lionesses legends to present each player with a velvet cap bearing their individual legacy number.

As part of last year's 50th anniversary celebrations, The FA confirmed every single player to have represented the Lionesses would receive their own legacy cap. It recognises their unique place in England history, dating back to the very first official FA match in 1972, and mirrors a similar initiative with the senior men's team.

Karen Bardsley, Rachel Brown-Finnis, Mo Marley and Ellen White were guests of honour and supported FA women's technical director Kay Cossington in making the presentations.

Introducing the ceremony in which she also paid tribute to FA women's development manager Rachel Pavlou for her work on the project, Cossington said: "Connecting the current generation of players to the history of the women's game is really important for us all as part of our identity and who we are as a team and as a Lionesses family. These legacy

numbers will allow us to keep connecting the past to the present day and moving forward to the future. We want to keep legacies alive."

Addressing the players directly, she added: "The number you receive, that captures a moment in time and is a unique honour. It is so special and only belongs to you."

Today's event saw caps presented to each of the 25 players in the current squad who have been capped, including Jordan Nobbs (legacy number 180) and Lucy Bronze (181) through to the most recent debutants Jess Park (225), Maya Le Tissier (226) and Katie Robinson (227).

As well as all future internationals receiving a legacy cap after making their first appearance, a celebration event will be held in the week of England's participation in the Finalissima in April allowing as many former Lionesses as possible the opportunity to receive their own cap. Members of the 1972 team were already recognised at the 2-1 defeat of United States at Wembley Stadium last October.

From the Arnold Clark Cup fixtures onwards, which will also see matches against Italy in Coventry on Sunday and Belgium in Bristol on Wednesday, every England player will always have their legacy number printed in their shirt for every international.

Emma Coates to lead England WU23s



Emma Coates has been appointed head coach of England Women's U23s. FA women's technical director Kay Cossington and Lionesses head coach Sarina Wiegman see the appointment as key to building on the significant progress within the player pathway through development teams to the senior set-up.

Coates has been working in the England coaching structure at St. George's Park, and is currently guiding the WU19s in their qualifying campaign for this summer's UEFA EURO. She will begin her new role for the 2023/24 season.

Mo Marley had been leading the WU23s while a full-time appointment was sought but will now return to providing mentoring to national coaches.

Marley had originally chosen to step back from full-time coaching in October 2020. Coates said: "It is a really proud moment to become head coach of the WU23s and I would like to thank Kay for the opportunity.

"It is always a privilege to work in the pathway with England teams. This new role is particularly exciting with how closely it is aligned to the seniors. You can see the flurry of promising players that have come through recently and how Sarina is committed to giving them an opportunity if they are performing."

"We have some incredible talent in our system. As a coach I am driven by player development and committed to helping individuals to improve, which goes hand in hand with learning how to win football matches as a team. I see this role as an opportunity for me to bring together all of my experiences from Leeds, Doncaster and England to help maintain that flow of players who transition through to the seniors, making the most of their talent as football players and helping them grow as people off the pitch too."

Coates also spoke about the importance of St. George's Park as a "hub for football" and the opportunity it provides to "create connectivity between all teams and coaches". She also paid tribute to Marley, adding: "I am super lucky to have been able to learn from her at first hand and see the standards she holds. The number of top players she has helped develop is phenomenal."

Cossington said: "I am delighted we have been able to make this appointment. Emma brings exceptional experience of our player pathway, but also has the know-how of coaching within the Barclays Women's Super League and at international tournaments.

"Appointing Emma to this role is an endorsement for the work being done within our technical directorate to support talented female coaches. I would also like to thank Mo for the way she continues to support England teams. She is an incredible coaching role model."

Having begun her coaching career with Leeds United, Coates went on to Doncaster Rovers Belles – becoming head coach in June 2016 before joining The FA as a national-team coach just over a year later.

Fresh from a 3-0 win against Switzerland for the WU19s last week, Coates will lead that age group in April when they take on mini-tournament hosts Spain, Slovenia and Belarus for a place in the EURO finals in Belgium this July.

Recruitment for the coach to lead the WU19s from next season will begin in due course. The WU23s returned as an age-group team in October 2021 – a month after Wiegman began her work with the seniors – and started the new era with a 1-0 win in Belgium. Five of that squad – including match-winner Katie Robinson - featured in the Arnold Clark Cup-winning senior squad last week.

The Young Lionesses impress against Belgium



England women's under-23s made a winning end to the month with an impressive 4-1 victory over Belgium in Tranmere.

Goals from Missy-Bo Kearns, Angela Addison, Anna Patten and Kiera Skeels sealed a memorable night on Merseyside for Mo Marley's team.

And while the scoreline may have been cruel on a Belgian team who had their moments, the Young Lionesses showed a clinical side in front of a 1300-strong crowd on a clear night at Prenton Park.

England started on the front foot, with the visitors having to make some last-ditch challenges in the opening 15 minutes.

It was no surprise when the Young Lionesses took the lead in the 16th minute, as Aggie Beaver-Jones embarked on a darting run before playing through Kearns.

And the Liverpool ace brought the loudest cheer of the night, playing on her native Merseyside, as she made no mistake by slotting home to the left of keeper Lisa Lichtfus.

Belgium began to play their way back into the game and started to show a threat going forward, which resulted in them drawing level in the 27th minute when Shari Van Belle picked out Marie Minnaert to fire past Kayle Rendell.

As half time approached, England came close to retaking the lead when Ruby Mace fizzed a shot narrowly wide of the post.

The second half belonged to England though, and less than ten minutes after the re-start they had restored their advantage.

Again, it was Beaver-Jones at the heart of the move as she skilfully advanced past two players before setting Angela Addison through on goal and the Charlton forward made no mistake by lifting the ball over Lichtfus and into the net.

And it was 3-1 just before the hour mark as a short corner routine saw Poppy Pattinson try her luck with a shot at goal through a crowded box. Lichtfus palmed away her effort, but only back out to Patten who finished from close range.

Belgium were still causing problems for England's rearguard and Rendell, who had impressed with her handling throughout, saved well to deny Lisa Petry in front of former England goalkeeper Rachel Brown-Finnis who was among the crowd at Prenton Park.

There was still time for Kearns to see a shot cannon back off the crossbar in the 87th minute, before the evening was rounded off in the last minute when Skeels nodded home Pattinson's free-kick from the right to seal a memorable end to the month for Marley and her squad.

England: 13 Kayla Rendell (Southampton), 2 Jorja Fox (Brighton & Hove Albion, on loan from Chelsea), 3 Poppy Pattinson (Brighton & Hove Albion), 4 Ruby Mace (Leicester City, on loan from Manchester City), 6 Anna Patten (Aston Villa, on loan from Arsenal) (c), 7 Angela Addison (Charlton Athletic), 8 Missy Bo Kearns (Liverpool), 9 Emma Harries (Reading), 10 Laura Blindkilde Brown (Aston Villa), 11 Aggie Beaver-Jones (Everton on loan from Chelsea), 16 Kiera Skeels (Charlton Athletic)

Substitutes: 18 Molly Pike (Leicester City) for Harries 60, 14 Mel Filis (West Ham United) for Mace 71

Substitutes not used: 1 Lucy Thomas (Birmingham City), 5 Mia Ross (Charlton Athletic), 12 Anouk Denton (West Ham United), 17 Asmita Ale (Tottenham Hotspur), 19 Tara Bourne (Birmingham City, on loan from Manchester United), 20 Ruby Grant (University of North Carolina), 23 Eleanor Dale (University of Nebraska), 24 Ella Morris (Southampton), 25 Paige Peake (Southampton)

Goals: Missy-Bo Kearns 16, Angela Addison 53, Anna Patten 59, Kiera Skeels 90

Squad Headaches for Wiegman



By Jamie Davies

England boss Sarina Wiegman's success at the Arnold Clark Cup reminds her just how hard selecting a squad for the World Cup is going to be.

Ahead of the opening round of last month's Arnold Clark Cup in Milton Keynes, this was a sneak preview of what Wiegman could work with when the European champions head to Australia/New Zealand for this summer's FIFA Women's World Cup.

Seeing unfamiliar faces in an England shirt of Lauren James, Laura Coombs and Jordan Nobbs feature in the four team tournament was an indication that there are so many talented pool of English players that sadly not all will be able to make the plane trip to down under.

Even in their 2nd game (vs Italy), Wiegman made multiple changes from the 4-0 win over Korea Republic which maybe considered as her weaker squad but still got the win. All of these options are clearly going to cause headaches for the Dutch international coach but still it could be worse for a football manager.

After the win in Milton Keynes against Korea Republic, Wiegman's post-match press conference was a clear theme from the media that England are spoilt with squad depth and options right now.

Chelsea forward, Lauren James, had only played a handful of games for her country going into February's Arnold Clark Cup but Wiegman had starting squad ideas for the 21-year-old who had a brilliant tournament.

Wiegman said: "It's not the World Cup just yet but last season she (Lauren James) played a lot

and she was still building. This year she is playing more and more and she feels good and you can tell she plays very well. From the wings we have so many attacking players that are doing really well which means we have starting options and also sub options to choose from.

"Lauren (James) has been a talent for a long time and needed some time especially at Chelsea she has worked really hard and that would get her the next step into the national team. I hope now she stays consistently fit and that she enjoys herself."

When the two-time European Championship winner was asked about her forward options, she made it clear her depth is a nice problem to have. Wiegman added: "I can't complain about the depth in this team let's put it that way.

"I don't like to have headaches but in this case I do. It is also very enjoyable, what you saw today (England's 4-0 win against Korea Republic) that this team works so hard and wants to do so well.

"They all deliver all the time in training sessions, on the pitch and as a team they really collaborate but now as you saw on the pitch we made a lot of substitutes and we kept on going."

Back in December, the England boss made a request to FIFA to extend the squad limitation for the World Cup to be 26 players but it was rejected by the world governing body. Instead, all 32 teams competing can register no more than 23 players which is three less than what a country could take to last year's Women's Euros.

That alone creates a dilemma for Wiegman and her coaching staff as there is a guarantee that at least a handful of talented and in-form players will have to accept missing a World Cup.

Ward announces retirement



Helen Ward has announced her imminent retirement from football.

Ward has represented Cymru 105 times, and is their all-time leading goal scorer with 44 goals.

Ward will be retiring from the national team with immediate effect, and will be retiring from club football, where she plays for Watford, at the end of this season.

Ward's statement read:

Luxembourg, Tuesday 30th September 2008. The day my life changed. It was the first time I'd pulled on the red shirt and proudly wore the Dragon on my chest. I stood for THE anthem and suddenly, it became more than just a game. Never did I imagine that that honour would be bestowed upon me more than a hundred times over.

I was part of a family. As an outsider from across the bridge, I was welcomed into the most special group of people and I never looked back. Those girls, that team and Cymru became everything to me.

The pride I feel every time I hear those words; 'Mae Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau' and the sense of belonging will never, ever leave me. Playing for Wales became my why. It's the reason I kept going and wanting to improve; the rea-

son I came back after having my children; why I didn't let covid be the end and why I realise that it's not where you are born that counts, but where you feel like you belong and I've never felt more at home than when I'm with my team, in Wales.

It breaks my heart that I didn't make it to a major tournament with this team, that I wasn't at my peak when so many of my teammates were and are. But I KNOW they will make it soon and they will shine on the biggest stage of all and I cannot wait to be their best cheerleader when that happens.

It's not always been easy, but it's been the best ride of my life and I couldn't have done it without my girls. Some of you have been there from day one and plenty more have joined along the way. They're a special bunch and they're my family.

Diolch to every player, staff member and fan who have trusted me, a muggle, to represent you and wear your shirt. The love I have for you is endless.

I gave you everything I have, I hope you know that.

Dwi'n dy garu di, Cymru.

Interview: Ffiona Evans



By Aisling Hannon

Aberystwyth Town have just come off the back of a Welsh Women's Cup semi-final defeat to Briton Ferry Llansawel, denying them their first ever final, but are determined to give it their all as they approach phase two of their league campaign.

Versatile Ffiona Evans was part of the team that last reached the Welsh Cup semi-final in 2011. In her 16th season, Ffiona's love for her club is still going strong. Aisling Hannon chatted to Ffiona about her hopes for the remainder of the year, the increasing popularity of the club, and the most talented players in Wales right now.

Where did your interest in football come from?

From my brother and my dad. My dad used to play when he was younger and coached a lot. My brother always played so I

was in the back garden playing too. My dad is always the first person to tell me if I had a bad game or a good game. Both mum and dad are always encouraging me. I came to Aberystwyth at 18 when I moved here for Uni, and I'm still here!

Have you noticed an increase in interest in the women's game in Wales?

Definitely. The Lionesses winning the EUROs helped us in that we have seen a huge increase in our club since then. We have girls football camps every half-term and interest in the juniors' section has increased massively. When we play our games at the weekend, we try to get as many mascots as we can so that they can get involved. You can see little girls at our matches now, cheering us on and being really engaged with the game.

How do you reflect on the season so far?

The league has been a little bit disappointing for us, going from finishing in the top four last year when we were on a massive high. It was always going to be a big ask to do that again. The way we started the season wasn't great but as the season progressed, we've gotten better and better. In the sense of the cups, it was disappointing to lose but they were tough sides.

What do you do outside of football?

I work for Bala Town men's team, I'm a sports therapist for them, and also the Welsh FA and a bit with Swansea City Academy. So even when I'm not playing, I'm still involved in football!

What is the highlight of your footballing career?

Reaching the Welsh Cup semi-final in 2011 is definitely one of the highlights. Also last year, in the last game before the split, we went down to Port Talbot and had to win that game to finish in the top four. Coming away with a win there and securing a top four was one of the best highlights for the club. We went six years in a row winning the Central Wales Cup – something for the history books! Not many people will know about that cup but it was nice for us to win it.

Have you ever suffered any setbacks or bad injuries?

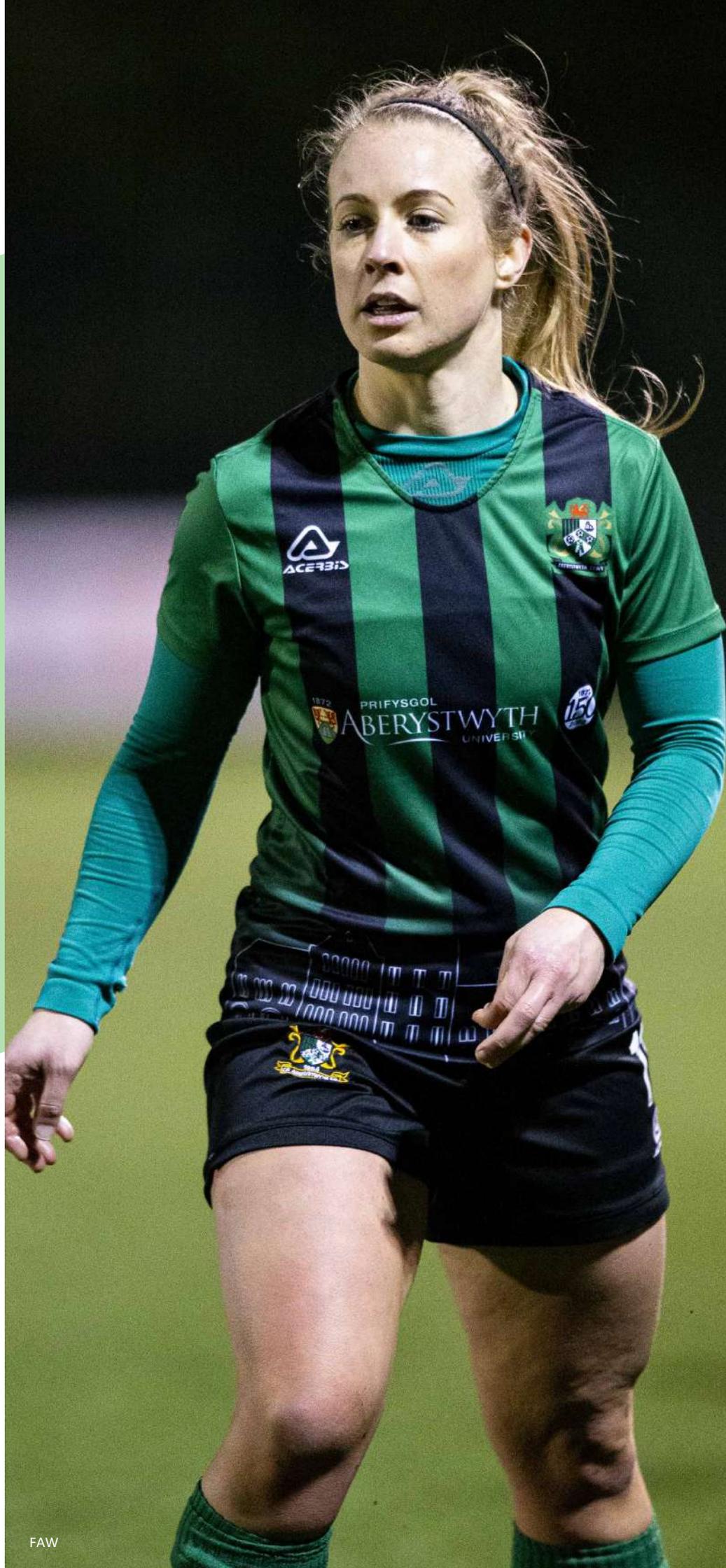
No, thankfully I've never suffered any bad injuries. I missed maybe a couple of weeks here and there with minor knocks but I've been lucky!

Who is the best player you have played against?

There's been a few tough ones! Rhianne Oakley with Cardiff is really good. She's super-fast, powerful and quick with her feet - one you don't want to come up against! Emily Allen and Robyn Pinder with Cardiff Met are quite tricky and fast, they never slow down! Stacey John-Davis at Swansea is another player who is very tricky to play against.

What's the atmosphere like in the dressing room before a game?

Pretty rowdy at times! But in a good way. We have some characters who are constantly chatting but some are a little quieter. The music is always blaring and it's a fun atmosphere!



Scottish FA and FA Wales join in support of Football vs Homophobia

The Scottish FA and the Football Association of Wales (FAW) united to dedicate the Scotland v Cymru match at the Pinatar Cup tournament to the pivotal Football v Homophobia campaign.

February marks the Football v Homophobia (FvH) Month of Action, which unites football in opposing homophobia and prejudice against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT+) people, whilst welcoming and celebrating diversity across the game.

By leveraging the platform of their upcoming match in support of the FvH Month of Action, the Scottish FA and FAW aim to increase visibility of this vital campaign, encouraging conversation on the importance of supporting the LGBTI+ community and highlighting the challenges and barriers that still exist across the game.

Munro Stevenson, Participation and Engagement Manager, LEAP Sports Scotland said: "At FvH Scotland, we are excited that the first ever FvH international dedicated match will be Scotland vs Cymru.

"This historic landmark demonstrates the hard work put in by the Scottish FA, FAW and our partners at FvH Cymru, ensuring that homophobia has no place in Scottish or Welsh football. Representation and allyship at an elite level is often seen by the LGBTI+ football community as the most impactful way to make meaningful change in our sport.

"We are extremely proud to see this enacted by the Scotland Women's National Team. We know the players are passionate about this issue, and their participation in raising awareness during the Month of Action is greatly appreciated."

Lou Englefield, FvH Cymru Campaign Director, said: "The Cymru Women's Team have been long standing supporters of LGBTI+ inclusion and of Football v Homophobia.

"Their leadership in this space can make such a difference as the Women's game grows in



Wales. We're delighted to have this show of support during the February month of action."

Robin Drummond, Scottish FA Equality, Diversity and Inclusion manager said: "The Scottish FA is united in our campaign to ensure that football is for all.

"Together, with our partners at LEAP Sport, we are committed to ensuring there is a safe and healthy environment for everyone involved in our national game, as well as equitable access for the LGBTI+ community.

"We're extremely proud to have our women's national team take part in the Football v Homophobia campaign. Alongside our friends at the FAW, we hope this match will put a spotlight on the campaign at the highest level."

Carys Ingram, FAW Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Integrity Executive said: "We are delighted to be working alongside FvH Cymru, FvH Scotland and the Scottish FA to come together in a joint message of inclusion during the Football v Homophobia month of action.

"It's incredibly important that we continue to create opportunity, visibility, awareness and conversation around the barriers and challenges our LGBTI+ community face in football and how we move towards a better future where there are not only opportunities provided, but the LGBTI+ community can also feel a sense of belonging in these environments."

Double cup heart-break for Aberystwyth Town

Aberystwyth Town Women bowed out of the Genero Adran Trophy at the semi-final stage, falling to Cardiff Met 3-1 at Cyncoed Campus.

Amy Jenkins grabbed what turned out to be the Seaside's consolation goal in the 50th minute after Ellie Preece, Tija Richardson and Emily Allen had put the Archers ahead.

"When you're going to top teams like Cardiff Met, who were excellent on the day, you can't afford to make any mistakes," said manager Gav Allen.

"We grafted, we worked hard, but we came up short."

Without centre-half Elin Jones - whose ACL injury was confirmed this week - and midfielder Shauna Chambers, Aber's starting line-up included 15-year-old Modlen Gwynne, with another youngster Ella Thomas on the bench.

Both had been given the thumbs-up to compete in senior football just last week.

17-year-old Elan Jones also made her third senior appearance, coming on as a second-half substitute - and Allen was pleased with how the youngsters acquitted themselves.

"It was great to have those three on the pitch," he said. "None of them looked out of place on such a big occasion."

And there is no time for Aber to dwell on defeat as they have another semi-final coming right up - against Briton Ferry in the FAW Women's Cup.

There was more heartbreak for Aberystwyth as they were knocked out of the FAW Women's Cup at the semi-final stage by second-tier Briton Ferry Llansawel.

On a chilly day at Carmarthen's Richmond Park, Gavin Allen's side struggled to assert themselves and paid the price, falling 3-0.

Goals from Megan Kearle, Lowri Baker and Fleur Jenkins secured the win for Ferry - while salt was rubbed into the Aber wound when



Rebecca Mathias was sent off at the end of the match.

There were some chances for the Seaside's, but they were few and far between - two good efforts from Shauna Chambers, a Libby Isaac free kick, and a shot from Emily Thomas that flew over the bar were the most notable.

There were plaudits too for 17-year-old goalkeeper Carys Pugh-Jones, between the sticks due to Elen Valentine's absence on international duty with Wales U19s.

Abergavenny deducted points

The FAW's National League Board has confirmed that Abergavenny are to be deducted six points from their 2022/23 total for twice breaching League Rule 21.7 by failing to fulfil a fixture - on Wednesday 11 January 2023 and Wednesday 25 January 2023.

Genero Adran Premier Rule 21.7 states: "Any Club without just cause failing to fulfil an engagement to play its League matches on the appointed date or causing a game to be abandoned without giving a reason deemed to be satisfactory by the Board shall have three points deducted, be liable for any reasonable expenses as deemed necessary by the Board and shall be fined £150. Any subsequent charges will be fined £250 and shall have three points deducted for each offence."

The club may refer the matter to an Appeals Panel of the Football Association of Wales and

written notice of such action must be received by the FAW no later than 4.30pm on Tuesday 28 February 2023.

After the statement was released, Abergavenny took to Twitter to say: "We have today been made aware via SOCIAL MEDIA that we have breached Rule 21.7 by not fulfilling two fixtures on Wednesday 11th January and Wednesday 25th January.

"We will be appealing this decision with the National League Board and providing our evidence around this.

"We would also like to put on record that we were not or have not been made aware that a points deduction would be issued and we have not been contacted by anyone at the FAW prior to this decision and statement being made which we are extremely disappointed about."

FAW approves far reaching changes to bring about improvements to make football in Wales fit for the future

The FAW Board has approved far reaching changes across its area associations which will lead to improved equality and diversity in governance, investment in grassroots football and increased sustainability.

The recommendations of the independent Area Association Review were agreed by a vote in a full meeting of the board at the FAW Collier's Park in Wrexham. This builds upon the 80 recommendations, adopted by the FAW in 2021, from the 'Sustainable Association For The Future' report. There are 30 recommendations in total and the the aim is to deliver these within the next 18 months.

Key recommendations of the review include:

- Appropriately resourced regional structures that meet the needs of all grassroots football competition across Wales.
- Modern, diverse and well-governed Associations with the creation of skills-based boards that are diverse, relevant and effective with improved decision making.

- A full time General Manager in each Association with a formal link to the core FAW grassroots team who lead on football development.

- Dedicated grassroots support.

FAW Chief Executive, Noel Mooney, said: "Investment in our grassroots and ensuring that football in Cymru is fit for the future are the key focus of our 'Ein Cymru' strategy. The far-reaching changes that have now been approved by the board are a clear demonstration of the FAW's commitment to building a diverse, skilled and welcoming football family that promotes excellence, integrity, inclusivity and fair play.

"The important investment in a full time General Manager for each of the Area Associations shows that we are serious in our intention to support clubs across Cymru at the grassroots level. In addition to the General Manager positions, the FAW is also investing in the core team staff to support grassroots clubs."

Cliftonville make history

Cliftonville Football Club have announced details of the first ever professional contracts signed by female players at Solitude.

As the countdown to the new Women's Premiership campaign continues, 12 of last season's title-winning side have put pen to paper on two-year deals that represent a trailblazing milestone in the history of Ireland's Oldest Football Club.

Academy products Fi Morgan and Toni-Leigh Finnegan have been joined in signing up by long-serving Marissa Callaghan and January recruit Vicky Carleton, the players who scored

the vital goals on the night that Cliftonville Ladies clinched their first ever League crown last term.

McGuinness sisters Kirsty and Caitlin have also committed their futures to the Reds, as have Louise McDaniel, Danielle Maxwell, Abbie Magee, Kelsie Burrows, Yasmin White and Hannah Doherty.

In addition to congratulating each player on being part of this historic occasion, we also express our pleasure at seeing them extend their stays at Solitude until at least 2025.



Fixtures announced for new season

The Northern Ireland Football League have released the 2023 Women's Premiership fixtures.

Champions Cliftonville Ladies will launch the defence of their title when they host Linfield Women on April 21 and in a major change, the vast majority of matches in the new campaign will be played on Fridays.

The Belfast Telegraph revealed two weeks ago that NIFL had listened to clubs and agreed to radically change the programme.

The hope is that changing to Fridays will boost attendances and appeal to younger fans by moving to a more family-friendly kick-off time at the same time as the League expands to 10 teams and moves into a professional era.

Derry City Women, Mid Ulster Ladies and League newcomers Ballymena United Women will continue with the traditional Wednesday night dates, while some clubs are expected to

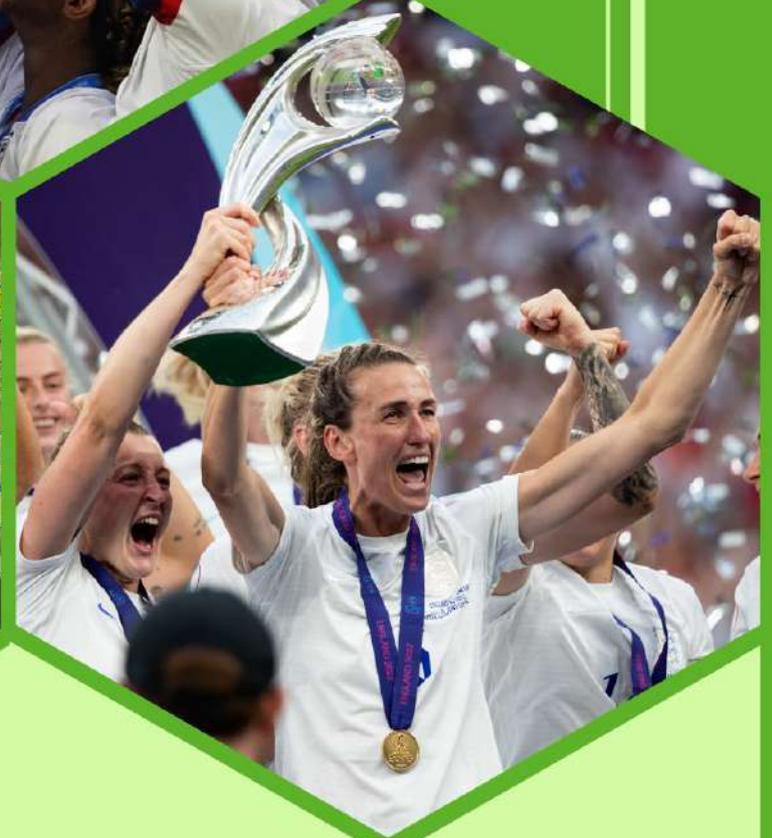
move matches to Sundays, with the agreement of visiting teams.

This season the 10 teams will play each other twice during an 18-match campaign, which is one more than last season's campaign, which took a two-month break due to the Women's Euro 2022 Finals.

Newcomers Ballymena United and Larne Women will have to wait until the second week of the season before playing their first home matches, travelling to Crusaders Strikers and Sion Swifts Ladies respectively on the opening night.

**OPENING WOMEN'S PREMIERSHIP
FIXTURES (Friday, April 21, all 7.45pm):**

Cliftonville v Linfield,
Crusaders Strikers v Ballymena United
Glentoran v Derry City
Lisburn v Mid Ulster
Sion Swifts v Larne



INTERNATIONAL TOURNAMENTS

FIFA Women's World Cup Trophy Tour Send-Off event heralds start of global football challenge



The stage is set for an extraordinary FIFA Women's World Cup™ Trophy Tour after a special Send-Off event in Melbourne / Naarm on Saturday marked the start of a global journey that will inspire the next generation of female football stars.

The celebration took place in the shadow of the Melbourne Rectangular Stadium, which will host six matches during the FIFA Women's World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023™, ahead of the first official stop on the Trophy Tour in Japan on 25-26 February.

The Send-Off event coincided with the arrival of the Unity Pitch, which was in Melbourne / Naarm for the day and will tour all nine Host Cities ahead of the start of the tournament.

Female Football Freestyle world champion Lia Lewis was on hand to help open the Unity Pitch by inspiring dozens of youngsters in attendance with an astonishing display of her skills before passing on her tips.

As the Trophy Tour's dedicated Skills Coach, Lia Lewis will set Skills Drills over the coming weeks and months to her more than 3.9 million followers on TikTok, as well as across FIFA's social media and FIFA+, giving women and girls worldwide the chance to join the fun.

"Before freestyle football, I was a ballet dancer. I did 18 years of ballet, five years ago, thinking back, I couldn't kick a ball. Five years later, I can't believe I'm here," Lia Lewis said.

"This Trophy Tour is all about Going Beyond, and through the Skills Drills, we are making football

accessible, creative and fun. Skills Drills will showcase incredible women's talent and, more importantly, inspire women and girls worldwide to take part in something inspirational."

USA national team legend Kristine Lilly, the most capped international footballer of all time, was also in attendance, engaging with the youngsters and sharing her Women's World Cup experiences.

Speaking in anticipation of the tournament, she said: "The growth of the women's game and the support behind it has been incredible. To be at 32 teams in the World Cup is so great for so many reasons – for all these countries who haven't had the opportunity but now they do, it's incredible."

"The growth of the game and how many teams are going to be competing in this World Cup is going to create so much more hype and excitement and challenge those countries that have been there for a while. So, it's going to be exciting to watch the games and you can get your tickets now, so please do, and support the women's game."

Saturday's FIFA Women's World Cup™ Trophy Tour Send-Off event also included the unveiling of a special mural designed by New Zealand Football Fern, Hannah Wilkinson, in one of Melbourne / Naarm's world famous laneways.

The FIFA Women's World Cup™ Trophy Tour will visit all 32 of the tournament's participating nations, and will return to Melbourne / Naarm on 14-16 June, inspiring people across the globe ahead of the big kick-off on 20 July.

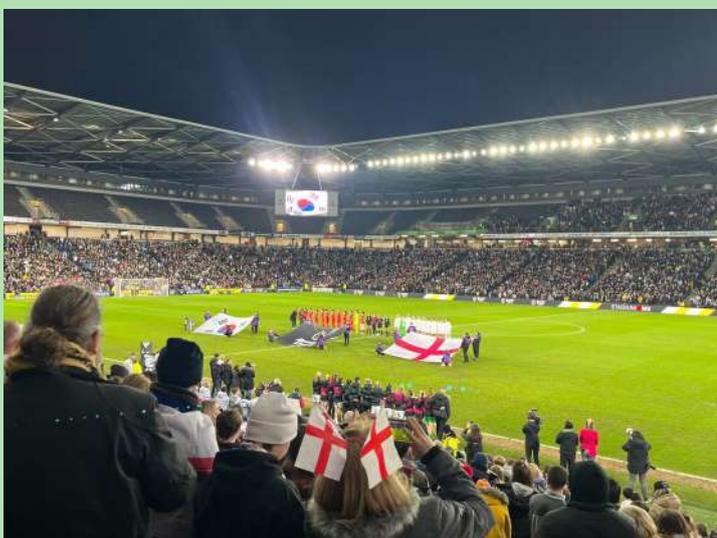
The diary of a travelling journalist

Our very own Jamie Davies travelled to all three rounds of this year's Arnold Clark Cup for The Women's Football Magazine.

Milton Keynes, Coventry and Bristol were this year's venues for the four-team tournament so that meant a lot of travelling involved between the cities.

Last year the tournament took place mainly around the north east of Middlesbrough and Norwich before it concluded in the Midlands area in Wolverhampton with England being crowned the winners.

Round 1 – Milton Keynes (February 16th)



The opening round commenced just outside of London in Milton Keynes as Stadium MK welcomed England, South Korea, Belgium and Italy.

Stadium MK is a ground I have only visited once before which was last summer for semi-final two of the Women's Euros. Germany and France were in town and remembered Alexandra Popp scoring a superb header but sadly for her and the German team, she would miss the Euro final due to injury.

The train, as it will be for most of the match day trips, was my main transport for the opening day.

It was a bit of a cloudy day in Milton Keynes but despite the weather looking rather dull, it did not stop the fans from coming out.

As expected, a majority of the supporters were there for the European champions as they were

playing in the evening game just 90 minutes after the outcome of Belgium vs Italy.

There was a low attendance at the opener but still over 8,000 turned up to see the opener and it was a great match to see. Italy with so much more promise with the style they were playing, you had them down to take away the three points. Instead a late winner from Belgium's Tessa Wullaert broke Italian hearts.

With the opening match coming to a close there was only just over an hour until the next game which meant quick transitions from attending the manager's press conferences of Italy and Belgium, before collecting the team sheet for England and Korea Republic.

It was only myself and one other journalist that attended Milena Bertolini's press conference. Milena looked upbeat despite the defeat – her press conference had to be translated, as she couldn't speak English.

Onto the 2nd and final game of the day as the atmosphere was growing more and more ahead of the 7:45pm kick-off. The spirit of Euro 2022 was clearly still alive for all to see. The temperatures had dropped in-between the two matches but that was not going to stop anyone from supporting the Lionesses.

The visitors of Korea Republic had the setting of everyone against them and it was a mentality too difficult to ignore as England comfortably struck the net on four occasions during the 90 minutes.

As expected, pretty much all of the press had attended Sarina Wiegman's post-match press conference as the main talking point was the depth of her squad. The Dutch coach has a big headache ahead of selecting her team for this summer's World Cup.



Korea Republic manager Colin Bell, who is from England, came into the press conference room before Wiegman and although he didn't face many questions the highlight was his praise towards the England team.

One match day done, two more to go.

Round 2 – Coventry (February 19th)



The penultimate round took place in Coventry at the Coventry Building Society Arena on a Sunday afternoon/evening.

The sun was out for a beautiful day for some football to be played.

I took the train to Coventry which is located in the city centre before catching a short train to Coventry Arena stop, based outside the stadium. Arrived there so early the media accreditation reception was not even open yet, just showed how excited I was to see all four teams again.

Once I finally picked up the accreditation, it was straight to the press room to get ready for the first match which today saw England go out onto the pitch first as they were facing Italy. But before the 3:15pm kick-off, there was an off the record conversation with the Director of Women's Football, Sue Campbell between herself and the press. Nothing that can be revealed from it but keep an eye out for some developments in the women's game over the next few months.

Once all that was done, every member of press headed to the press box as the winter sun glowed into the arena. Over 32,000 came to see England which was higher figures than Milton Keynes and it was also a stadium record breaking crowd in Coventry – unbelievable.

Despite the home support, Italy displayed an inspired performance by grabbing an equalizer in

the second half but their efforts were shoved to the side by a Rachel Daly brace. Both goals coming from a header.

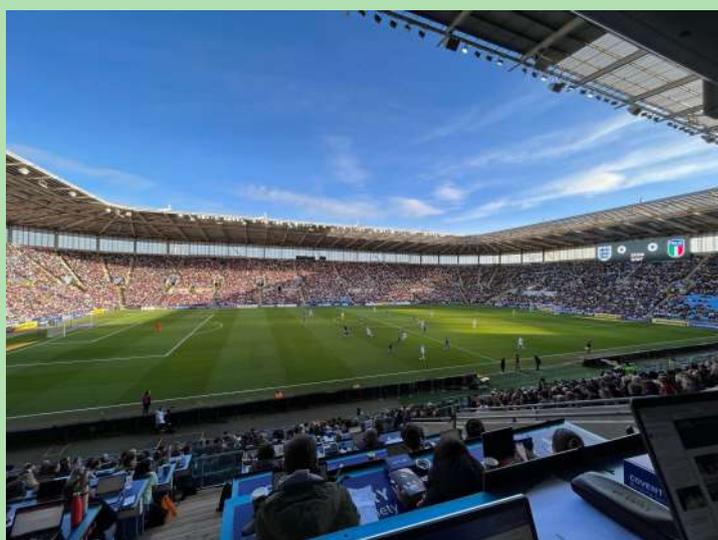
Even with Wiegman playing her 2nd team, she can still pull out results.

Shortly after the full time whistle, the England squad stayed put to do a lap of honour with the big crowds. The interaction between the England players and the fans right now is very strong and will only get bigger if results keep coming their way.

Just like Milton Keynes, there wasn't much of a break between the two fixtures in the same stadium. Wiegman got a lot of questions about individual players in which she never likes to talk about her players individually.

Now the worry about the 2nd match was if the crowds were going to stay put for Belgium vs Korea Republic. Sadly a majority of them were satisfied with just the England game but some did stick around to watch the event unfold.

A win for Belgium would keep them in conten-



tion for the Arnold Clark Cup while Colin Bell hoped to see a response from his players after a 4-0 defeat to the hosts.

There was a small patch of Korea supporters to my far right who had drums and used their vocals to make their presence heard throughout the evening game. It was great support and also the Italy manager of Bertolini was sitting just two rows behind me spectating the final match of the day.

The Red Flames made it two wins out of two knowing that they would go into the final round

needing to beat England to win the cup.

Because there was a lot less press around for Belgium-Korea Republic, we were able to pretty much do some one to one interviewing with the Belgium manager, Ives Serneels, and Korea boss Colin Bell.

When speaking to Serneels, he was not expecting his team to beat an in-form England side on match day 3 while Bell was stressing that his team and leagues in Korea are currently an off-season which means his players are not up to scratch.

It was everything to play for in Bristol come the final round.

Round 3 – Bristol (February 22nd)



Here it is! The final round of this year's Arnold Clark Cup!

We started in Milton Keynes then travelled up to the midlands in Coventry and now the curtain closer for match day 3 takes place in Bristol at Ashton Gate – the home of Bristol City Football Club.

We've seen business as usual so far for the Lionesses with Belgium also being victorious while Italy and Korea Republic have had a difficult week.

The final day would kick-off with Italy taking on Korea Republic as both attempt to avoid rock bottom followed by the duel for the Arnold Clark Cup of England vs Belgium.

I stayed at a hotel which was just a 30 minute walk from Ashton Gate and straight away realized how hilly the city is when making my way by foot to the stadium. Only my 2nd ever visit to the city but I can see why the place is

praised as one of the best cities in the UK, as it is full of wonderful views and settings.

But who was going to have a scintillating setting come the night of the third and final round of matches?

It was a very cold Wednesday as by the time Italy and Korea Republic had kicked off, the rain came plummeting down. Just like Milton Keynes' setup, fans were slowly coming in ahead of England's game.

Again it was another close encounter as Colin Bell's side showed a lot more confidence and when I asked the Head Coach if the motive was to the end the tournament on a high, he went with that as a meaning for his players to still show him what they've got.

It was another last minute winner with Italy this time causing the late thrills in front of a warm-up crowd for England. Throughout the whole tournament, Italy had looked very unlucky in their first two matches but at finish line they found what was missing to beat one of their opponents.

Did not have time to catch the manager's press conferences for the first game since it was a long walk from the press box to the press room, but I did make sure I was supplied with enough Cadbury hot chocolate to stay warm throughout the evening.

Ashton Gate had filled out by the time England and Belgium had got out there for the national anthems as the Lionesses were bidding for a second straight Arnold Clark Cup tournament win.

From the kick-off England dominated possession and created way more opportunities than their opponents which resulted in a long night for The Red Flames. Not 3, not 4, not 5 but 6 goals scored by Wiegman's side to seal a comfortable night and a third trophy since the ex-Netherlands manager replaced Phil Neville.

As always the press conferences took place afterwards with Belgium's manager happy with how his team did in the tournament while Wiegman knows she is on the right path but still a lot of work to do.

Arnold Clark Cup, you were fun!

Colin Bell: England are the best in the world



By Jamie Davies

Korea Republic manager Colin Bell claims that England are the best team in women's football right now.

In the opening round of this year's Arnold Clark Cup in Milton Keynes, the Asian Cup runners-up faced a one-sided performance from the Lionesses by getting thrashed 4-0 last month.

England would go on to win a second consecutive Arnold Clark Cup just 12 months after winning the inaugural competition and also winning a third trophy under the management of Sarina Wiegman since she started the role in 2021.

Speaking after the defeat to the European champions, the English-born coach made it clear who he thinks are at the top right now in women's international football. Bell said: "Congratulations to England, they have a fantastic team and for me they are the best team in the world at the moment."

"Sarina (Wiegman) has done a great job with an enormous squad that can replace players very easily so there is a high quality there."

"When we got the invitation we knew we would be playing during off-season (in Korean football) but do you say no to this opportunity when you are playing the best team in the world? Also against Italy and Belgium with a great atmosphere, of course you say 'yes'. We knew it was going to be difficult."

Korea lost all three games at the Arnold Clark Cup to England (4-0), Belgium (2-1) and Italy (2-1) as they finished at the bottom of the group with no points.

Not the outcome Bell would have wanted in their preparations for a World Cup year but the 61-year-old stressed the four-team tournament is not that vital, he added: "This tournament (Arnold Clark Cup) is great but it's not that important compared to a World Cup."

Bell also shared his thoughts on what could improve the quality of women's football in the Korea Republic to help them become more competitive at international level.

Bell said: "When everybody is fit and healthy we have a good side. Women's football in Korea in general needs to be professionalized and needs to be played at a higher intensity. The girls are full-time so they are able to train every single day."

"Let me just give you a quick schedule - Monday they have a game, Tuesday they have a day off as well as Wednesday and then Thursday is recovery day but what are they recovering from? Two days off but that is the system so these games with the physicality and the speed that England are, that is what I want the girls to experience. This is how fit you have to be if you want to be the best."

Korea Republic are in group H at this summer's Women's World Cup and will play Colombia, Germany and Morocco in an attempt to reach the knockout stages.

Arnold Clark Cup 2023: Match-by-Match

Gameday 1

Italy 1-2 Belgium



The opening game of the 2023 Arnold Clark Cup kicked off with two European nations of Italy and Belgium at Stadium MK in Milton Keynes.

Two places separate them in the FIFA rankings with Italy in 17th and Belgium in 20th giving you a hint that this fixture was going to be a close one.

With the hosts England being placed as the tournament favourites, this was a great opportunity for both Italy and Belgium to get off to a head start.

It was quite simply a game of two halves as Belgium controlled the opening half while Italy responded by being more dominant in the second period.

It took just 16 minutes for the tournament to have its first goal scored by Belgium's Marie Detruyer after a tremendous one-two display between herself and Tine De Caigny created a one-on-one situation with the goalkeeper to then slot the ball low into the net.

Belgium looked hungry for more as they did not want to let the momentum get away from them. They kept the Italians quiet as their only goal opportunity of the first half arrived on the 28th minute when a low ball cross-found Arianna Caruso in the

box who then struck the ball on target but it was a brilliant tip over the bar save from Katja Schroffenegger.

The 2nd half saw the Italians play a lot better and kept Belgium in their own half for large periods. Their efforts were awarded when substitute Manuela Giugliano curled the ball from close range with her outside boot just after the hour mark.

Italy kept fighting to complete a turnaround but a moment of magic had the Red Flames snatch the win as Tessa Wullaert picked up the pass from the right wing to then place the ball across the Italy goal and into the bottom corner of the net.

Belgium picking up all three points.

Italy: Schroffenegger, Orsi (Salvai 66'), Lenzini, Linari, Boattin, Rosucci, Caruso (Giugliano 64'), Greggi, Catena (Giacinti 59'), Cantore (Bonansea 80'), Piemonte (Girelli 66')

Goals: Giugliano 64'

Yellow Cards: Rosucci 46', Giacinti 89'

Belgium: Evrard, Cayman, Kees (Wullaert 63'), De Neve, Meersman (Deloose 77'), Biesmans, Vanhaevermaet (Eurlings 78'), Detruyer, Dhont (Wijnants (78'), De Caigny (Delacauw 62'), Janssens

Goals: Detruyer 16', Wullaert 90'

Yellow Cards: Biesmans 45'

Referee: Ewa Augustyn (POL)

Attendance: 8,705

England Republic 4-0 Korea

England started off 2023, and their preparations for this



summer's Women's World Cup, with a bang against Korea Republic at Stadium MK.

It was business as usual for the European champions with a 4-0 win in their Arnold Clark Cup opener.

Before the action begun, England players came out onto the pitch wearing pin badges on their anthem jackets to represent support for those that are affected by ovarian cancer after Beth Mead's mother sadly passed away from the disease earlier this year.

A front three starting line-up of Lauren James, Alessia Russo and Chloe Kelly from manager Sarina Wiegman just shows the options and depth she has even without Mead in selection. James' club form at Chelsea this season clearly merited by making the start of the opening match for her country.

It was going to be a tough encounter for the visitors as before the kick-off, England were unbeaten in their 26 matches in all competitions. Stopping that run was going to be an almighty task and not just for Korea but for Belgium and Italy as well.

England started very well as just three minutes in James had an attempt that went wide past the post after collecting a pass from Georgia Stanway.

It did not take long for Korea to respond from England's chance as two minutes later H J Choo cut in from the right wing to shoot for the bottom corner of the net, only for it to go straight to Mary Earps'

gloves. The Manchester United goalkeeper did not have much to worry about for the entire 90 minutes.

England's constant attack at Korea's net showed signs that an opening goal was coming imminently. The Lionesses got closer as Russo's right-footed shot struck the inside post, but could not cross the line. Then moments later, James was brought down in the box to win a penalty five minutes before the half time break. Georgia Stanway took to the spot and scored to get England's first goal of this year's tournament.

Straight from the kick-off to start the second half, Kelly doubled the lead for the hosts by collecting a loose ball from outside the Korea box to then lob the ball at goal.

England followed on from the second goal by unleashing hell on Korea as Kelly was involved again, this time the Manchester City forward crossed a low ball from the left for Russo to tap it home to make it 3-0. The match was put to bed before the game had even reached the hour mark.

The rest of the game was beginning to feel like a long shift for the Asian Cup runners-up as England continued to hold the possession in their opponent's half.

With over 20 minutes left to play, it was a special moment for Man City's Laura Coombs as she made her first England appearance since 2015. Eight years on, Wiegman showing faith in what many did not expect.

Another moment to treasure came for James who slotted her first ever goal for her country 12 minutes from time. The Chelsea forward's season is just getting better and better.

England's World Cup year couldn't have had a better start.

England: Earps, Bronze, Greenwood (Charles 63'), Williamson,

Bright, Kelly (Hemp 63'), Stanway (Coombs 67'), Russo (Daly 63'), Toone, James (Robinson 80'), Carter (Zelem 45')

Goals: Stanway (pen) 41', Kelly 46', Russo 50', James 78'

South Korea: J M Kim, H J Hong (G R Chun 86'), S J Lim, H R Kim, S G Jang, H J Choo, Y R Choe, G M Lee, Y J Kim (Y E Park 56'), C R Kang (S Y Shim 56'), H Y Son (Y B Jang 86')

Yellow Cards: H Y Son 8', S G Jang 57', J M Kim 85'

Referee: Andreza Ferreira (BRA)

Attendance: 21,030

Gameday 2

England 2-1 Italy



A brace from England's Rachel Daly made it two wins out of two to stay on top in the Arnold Clark Cup.

Daly's magnificent double header kept extended England's unbeaten run to 27 games in all competitions after a 2-1 win over Italy.

England manager Sarina Wiegman made huge changes from the win over South Korea in the opener. Nine changes made as the only players to stay in the starting line-up was Alex Greenwood and Jess Carter.

Their opponents also changed a few things around, eight changes in total as Martina Rosucci, Lisa Boattin and Martina Lenzi stayed in the original line-up.

Before the kick-off, Italy's Cristiana Girelli received her 100th cap but was she going to be much trouble for Ellie Roebuck and her defenders?

The opening minutes into the game was end-to-end action, as the visitors made their first move with Valentina Giacinti producing a low shot at goal but a fine save from Roebuck kept it out. Roebuck knowing that her appearance in Coventry would be monitored closely from the eyes of Wiegman.

The Lionesses responded quickly two minutes later when Cecilia Salvai mistakenly gave the ball away to Maya Le Tissier, who should have taken her opportunity better, but couldn't get the ball past the keeper.

England throughout most of the first half attacked down the left wing from Jess Park and Lauren Hemp, Italy defended well in response to the approach. The hosts then had a couple of go's on the other side which proved to be the game changer as Rachel Daly headed home the opener. After footage of the replay, it looked to have been offside but the goal had stood.

Daly again went for a header seconds before half time which rattled the crossbar.

The start of the second half had the Coventry crowd excited to see Jordan Nobbs coming on from the bench who will no doubt be bidding for a plane seat to down under this summer.

The Aston Villa midfielder got going quickly as she had the ball close from goal and thumped the ball at a very quick pace. A deflection from the shot went out of play.

Despite Nobbs' return, the visitors came out of the blocks in search for an equalizer. A goal to level it was given when substitute Sofia Cantore had her shot deflected for the ball to fly over Roebuck and into the back of the net.

The Coventry Arena went quiet as the Italians had a chance to end England's incredible unbeaten run.

However, Daly was at it again as she was no doubt playing a forward role just like she did in Milton Keynes. Another header resulting in another goal 19 minutes before the 90.

England held on for the remainder as another positive result of Wiegman's second choice players proving what a headache of decisions she has to make in terms of squad selection later on this year.

England: Roebuck, Alex Greenwood (62' Wubben-Moy), Walsh (45' Nobbs), Hemp (62' Kelly), Daly, Park (45' Zelem), Carter, Charles, Robinson (62' James), Le Tissier, Coombs

Goals: Daly 32', 71'

Italy: Giuliani, Bergamaschi (70' Orsi), Galli (55' Caruso), Giugliano, Rosucci, Giacinti, Girelli (55' Cantore), Bonansea, Boattin (45' Linari), Lenzini, Salvai

Goals: Cantore 62'

Referee: Ivana Projkowska (MKD)

Attendance: 32,128

Belgium 2-1 South Korea



Belgium & England to Dual it out for the Arnold Clark Cup

Belgium came from a goal down to win the game at 2-1 to put themselves joint top with England with just one game to go.

Both sides had different results on match day 1 of the Arnold Clark Cup back in Milton Keynes, as Belgium were victorious in a late winner over Italy (2-1) while South Korea were thumped by England (4-0).

The Red Flames' second game of the tournament was after England's win over Italy so they knew full well that a win over the Asian Cup runners-up was needed to keep their cup chances alive. For Colin Bell's South Korea, he was hoping for a response from his players after a painful 90 minutes against England.

Bell got what he wished for very early on when his side opened the scoring just 10 minutes in. A shot from outside the box by G M Lee took a deflection and the ball was too far for Diede Lemey to stretch for.

Former Chelsea star S Y Ji started in this match after staying on the bench in the England tie. The experience and talent of the midfielder was no doubt welcomed by the English crowd after leaving such a mark in the Women's Super League.

Ever since Korea took the lead, they started to allow Belgium to attack more.

Half an hour in Belgium went forward from the right with Sarah Wijnants on the run who then brings the ball back to Tessa Wullaert in the box. The skipper hit it first time but it went straight to the keeper. Then eight minutes afterwards, the team covered in a gold away kit struck the cross bar from a Valesca Ampoorter kick.

Belgium's consistent fight to get themselves back level was rewarded just before the interval. Wullaert, who fancied a long-range shot took a deflection to allow the ball to lob over J M Kim.

Then moments later Korea nearly retook the lead as C Jang hit the ball with her right foot from the edge of the box. Goalkeeper was never saving it.

Belgium continued their pursuit from the first half, Wullaert hit the cross bar and then minutes later substitute Tine De Caigny turned the score line around by

tapping the ball in from a crowded corner.

Korea looked to be losing a second game in a row but would not go down without a fight. Ji found herself in plenty of space and could not resist to go for glory as her attempt found the target but it wasn't enough of a challenge for Diede Lemey.

Ives Serneels and his group of players avoided a late equalizer from their opponents to keep themselves in with a shot of lifting the Arnold Clark Cup.

Belgium: Lemey, Philtjens (Detruyer 70'), Van Kerkhoven (Vangheluwe 70'), Colson (De Caigny 62'), Wijnants, Eurlings (Fon 62'), Wullaert, Vanhaevermaet (Cayman 62'), Deloose, Missipo, Ampoorter (Biesmans 70')

Goals: Wullaert 45', De Caigny 68'

Yellow Cards: Missipo 81'

South Korea: J M Kim, H R Kim, C Jang (46' C R Kang), H Y Son (E S Park 84'), S Y Shim, S J Lim, S G Jang, H J Choo, G M Lee, S Y Ji, Y R Choe (E Y Lee 90')

Goals: G M Lee 10'

Referee: Frida Mia Klarlund (DEN)

Gameday 3

Korea Republic 1-1 Italy



Martina Rosucci tapped in the last kick of the game to give Italy their first and only win at the 2023 Arnold Clark Cup.

The opening game of the final round did not have much at stake between the two sides as they lost both of their previous matches

against England and Belgium. This fixture was mainly just a motive to avoid finishing at the bottom of the group and end the campaign on a high.

Both teams will be heading to this summer's FIFA Women's World Cup so a clash like this one is good preparations.

Korea Republic had a dreadful start to the tournament as England put four past them in Milton Keynes before a much improved performance (despite defeat) in Coventry against Belgium.

Italy fell short in the last minute of their opening game against The Red Flames despite being the better side, followed by a 2-1 defeat to the European champions.

As expected, Italy were the favourites going into this and started to show why very quickly when Arianna Caruso headed the ball in after collecting a deflected cross from Annamaria Serturini.

The entire first half had rarities of Korea inside the Italy half, manager Colin Bell had stressed his team are off-season hence why the performances have been difficult for them to show their best qualities.

The rain came down very hard later on in the first half to create a damp pitch in build-up for the final game of England vs Belgium.

After the half time break, Italy continued their tempo by keeping Korea out.

However, as we have learnt throughout this tournament, all it takes is a moment of magic to get back in the game and that was exactly what we saw from Soyun Ji. The former Chelsea star was in the 18 yard box and picked up a flick pass to then slot the ball into the corner of the net. One a piece with 21 minutes left on the clock.

With seven minutes remaining, Korea looked to be the side with

the bigger chance to snatch the win. Somehow, a drilled shot from Hyojoo Choo was blocked on the line by Italy substitute, Martina Rosucci.

This match, with not a lot to play for, felt like a knockout encounter in the final minutes.

It looked to have both sides settling for a draw until the 94th minute where Italy gave it one last go and it paid off. Rosucci, all on her own in the six yard box, tapped in the winning goal.

Korea had to accept that their tournament would end with three defeats in a row, while Italy's recent form of just falling short had been overturned in their final outing.

Korea Republic: J Kim; H Kim, H Son, S Lim, S Jang, Y Choe, G Lee, C Kang, H Choo, S Ji, Y Kim.

Substitutes: J Ryu, K Kim 5 Hyeyeong Kim, H Hong, Y Park, G Chun, C Jang, S Shin, Y Bae, E Lee, J Lee, E Park, Y Jang, M Ko

Goals: S Ji 69'

Italy: Baldi; Bergamaschi, Filan-geri, Linari, Giugliano, Cantore, Giacinti, Serturini, Caruso, Lenzi-ni, Gregg

Substitutes: Giuliani, Schroffenegger, Galli, Rosucci, Girelli, Bonansea, Cafferata, Bon-fantini, Polli, Boattin, Piemonte, Salvai, Catena, Orsi, Severini

Goals: Caruso 6', Rosucci 90+4'

Referee: Andreza Ferreira (BRA)

Attendance: 6,938

England 6-1 Belgium



The Lionesses made it a second Arnold Clark Cup win in the space of 12 months after coming out on top in a winner takes it all clash against Belgium.

After six matches played out around the cities of Milton Keynes, Coventry and Bristol – it is England who continue their glittering run of 29 games unbeaten and now a third trophy (Women's Euro 2022 & 2 Arnold Clark Cups) under the management of Sarina Wiegman since she was appointed in 2021.

10 changes were made by Wiegman ahead of the final hurdle, Alex Greenwood was the only unchanged player as she started in all three games. Mary Earps was back in-between the sticks and the following front three of Alessia Russo, Ella Toone and Lauren James would give Belgium's defence something to think about.

Wiegman's starting line-up in Bristol looked to be her best squad on paper as between now and this year's Women's World Cup, the time to establish your best team is upon the Dutch coach.

Ahead of the kick-off, Belgium knew deep down their evening in Bristol could be a long one with Ashton Gate filled up by tens of thousands of England supporters.

An early corner effort from the visitors came to nothing then they found themselves on the back foot before it got worse when Chloe Kelly found the net just 12 minutes in. James, who is having the best season of her career, made an unstoppable run from the right wing to then enter the box to cross the ball to Kelly to finish the job.

The Red Flames' highlights from the opening period was keeping all 11 players in their own half as it was classic wave after wave of attacks from the hosts.

Before the game had reached the half hour mark, Millie Bright went in for a header from a corner kick

but headed the ball too high for it to hit the target.

Around 10 minutes later, James' pace came into action again and this time she cut across the edge of the penalty area to go for glory. Instead, the ball was lofted over.

Belgium struggled to create anything to avoid the score line from getting away from them.

Three minutes before the match reached the halfway point, England skipper Leah Williamson looked to have put the game to bed as she headed the ball in from the far post – Lucy Bronze with the cross from the left.

Lauren Hemp came on to replace James at the beginning of the second half and not long afterwards, England were scoring again. It was Kelly with another tap in after a howler from Belgium goalkeeper Nicky Evrard, in an attempt to save Ella Toone's long range effort, gave the ball straight to the Manchester City forward. Kelly would later on be awarded the tournament's Golden Boot winner by being the top goal scorer.

At this point into the cup final, it was just all about how many goals were Belgium going to concede.

66 minutes in, Toone swung in a cross that ended up landing on the top of the cross bar moments before Hemp fancied a goal by striking from the right hand side of the box, dealt with though by the goalkeeper. There was also a kick from Stanway which gave you vibes of her winning goal against Spain at the Euros but this time she couldn't convert.

Belgium's hole got even bigger 12 minutes before the end as Julie Biesmans could not hack a low ball cross from Stanway only to place the delivery into her own net.

England, as they did throughout the night, were simply hungry for goals and again they struck gold with Bronze adding to the list of

goal scorers by converting from 5 yards.

Even though the team in red were wanting the sound of the final whistle – substitute Elena Dhont scored from out of nowhere with a thunderbolt from 30 yards that left Mary Earps with no chance whatsoever in picking up a second clean sheet. It was a cracking goal but the night was England's with Williamson finding the net one more time with seconds to spare.

The 26,139 supporters who came out to witness the Lionesses lifting another trophy was a great reminder of how far this beloved squad has come in the space of two years.

Three wins out of three in the space of a week showed a real statement that this England team is going to go full on this summer to try and bring home a first ever World Cup.

England: Earps; Bronze, Greenwood (Carter 63'), Walsh (Wubben-Moy 81'), Bright, Williamson, Kelly, Stanway, Russo (Daly 72'), Toone (Park 81'), James (Hemp 46')

Substitutes: Roebuck, Maciver, Hemp, Daly, Park, Carter, Salmon, Zelem, Charles, Robinson, Wubben-Moy, Le Tissier, Nobbs, Coombs

Goals: Kelly 12', 50', Williamson 42', 90', Biesmans (OG) 78'

Belgium: Evrard, Wijnants, De Caigny, Wullaert (Fon 89'), Vanhaevermaet, Cayman, Vangheluwe (Deloose 62'), Detruyer (Dhont 62'), Janssens (Ampoorter 62'), Biesmans (Meersman 85'), Missipo (Eurlings 85')

Substitutes: Lemey, Bastiaen, Philtjens, Van Kerkhoven, Colson, Eurlings, Dhont, Deloose, Meersman, Fon, Ampoorter

Goals: Dhont 90'

Yellow Cards: Ampoorter 64'

Referee: Jelena Cvetkovic (SRB)

Attendance: 26,139





AROUND THE WORLD

Wolfsburg aiming for history

By Peter Mann

VfL Wolfsburg's defence of the DFB-Pokal Frauen has seen them reach the final four of this season's competition, alongside fellow, Frauen-Bundesliga giants, Bayern Munich, fourth place Freiburg, and the surprise package, RB Leipzig, leaders of the 2.Frauen Bundesliga.

Although Wolfsburg have the history, in all competitions, and have won the last eight, DFB-Pokal's, Leipzig are the polar opposite of the giants of the women's game, minnows perhaps, in every sense of the word.

Saban Uzun's side were only formed seven years ago and have risen quickly through the mire of the footballing pyramid, winning both the Landesliga Frauen Sachsen (2017), and Regionalliga Nordost (2020), with undefeated seasons, lifting the Sachsenpokal, back-to-back (2019 & 2020) for added measure.

The past two seasons in the 2.Frauen Bundesliga has seen Leipzig finish third on both occasions, reaching the Round of 16 back in 2021 (losing 4-0 at home to Eintracht Frankfurt), whilst this campaign, the Red Bulls (Die Roten Bullen), are looking at, and writing, history.

Leaders of the 2.Frauen Bundesliga, with twelve wins and a draw from their fourteen matches played, Leipzig currently hold a nine-point advantage atop of the division, whilst making the final four of the DFB-Pokal, it's seen them avenge that Frankfurt loss, a few years previous, along the way.

Die Roten Bullen began this seasons competition with a Second Round, 6-0 win, away to Turkiyemspor Berlin, before

avenging Frankfurt, on a famous night in Leipzig; home fans may have feared another exit to the Frauen Bundesliga high-fliers, Laura Freigang opening the scoring early in the first period.

German-born striker, Marlene Muller, however, made herself a hero when firing home a second-half brace, the winner coming in the closing minutes, and in doing so, sealed a famous, 2-1 home win.

That was back in November, they, like the other quarter-finalists, had to wait a while before the final eight ties were finally played, and Leipzig, they continued to do what they have all season, out the opposition to the sword, this time SGS Essen felt their wrath.

Leading by four at the break, Leipzig added a couple more in the second period, wrapping up a 6-1 home win as Vanessa Fudalla scored early in the first, and late in the second, her goals being added to by strikes from Media Desic, Gianna Rackow, Johanna Kaiser, and Lea Mauly; Ramona Maier with Essen's consolation.

Could the semi-finals be one step too far? Well, they will be drawn against one of the three sides currently sitting in the top divisions, top four, after they all won on the road in the quarters.

Leaders Wolfsburg, undefeated in the league with twelve from twelve, won 4-0 away to Koln; second place Munich edged their hosts, Hoffenheim 2-0; and Freiburg, fourth in the table, won 4-0 away to the other, remaining, 2.Frauen Bundesliga side, Carl Zeiss Jena.

As for the league, it now having passed the halfway stage, the Wolfsburg juggernaut shows no

signs of slowing, let alone stopping, at the top, they winning their two league games in February, both on the road, also without conceding, a 4-0 win at Freiburg swiftly followed by a 3-0 defeat of SGS Essen – league-wise, Alexandra Popp and Sveindis Jonsdottir netting one apiece in each.

Munich also claimed back-to-back successes, a 2-1 win over fellow, 'title' contenders, Frankfurt, as well as a 3-0 win at relegation-threatened, Turbine Postdam, Georgia Stanway with the opener in the latter.

Another top four side, Hoffenheim, they netted eleven in their two, league outings, both at home, and without conceding; Jana Feldkamp, Julia Hickelsberger, and Nicola Billa all netted braces in the 7-0 win against Duisburg, Billa's brace arriving in a matter of minutes, either side of the interval, before Koln were then brushed aside, 4-0, next time out, Melissa Kossler with a brace.

Werder Bremen pushed clear of the trouble at the bottom end of the table with wins away to both Leverkusen (2-0) and Postdam (2-1), and the worries for Postdam, at the foot of table, continue to worsen.

Games in quick succession, albeit at home, to Munich, and Bremen, yielded nothing but losses, 3-0 and 2-1 respectively, their plight seeing them without a win in twelve, and nine points from the three sides, Duisburg, Koln, and Bremen, respectively, and with games running out.



Earps and Sarina win Fifa awards



Lionesses coach Sarina Wiegman and goalkeeper Mary Earps have won awards at the FIFA: The Best event in Paris.

Wiegman was named coach of the year whilst Earps was voted Goalkeeper of the Year.

Leah Williamson, Beth Mead, Kiera Walsh and Lucy Bronze were also named in the Fifa XI of the Year.

Argentina hero Lionel Messi takes home the top men's player award following historic FIFA World Cup™ victory.

FC Barcelona Femení's Spanish midfielder Alexia Putellas claims the award for best player in the women's game.

The Best FIFA Football Awards 2022™ ceremony, held in Paris on Monday, 27 February, crowned Alexia Putellas and Lionel Messi as the outstanding players of the past year, alongside recognising the outstanding performances of coaches, goalkeepers and more

across the men's and women's game.

The winners of The Best FIFA Football Awards 2022:

- The Best FIFA Women's Player: Alexia Putellas (Spain/FC Barcelona Femení)
- The Best FIFA Men's Player: Lionel Messi (Argentina/Paris Saint-Germain FC)
- The Best FIFA Women's Goalkeeper: Mary Earps (England/Manchester United WFC)
- The Best FIFA Men's Goalkeeper: Emiliano Martínez (Argentina/Aston Villa FC)
- The Best FIFA Women's Coach: Sarina Wiegman (England Women's National Team)
- The Best FIFA Men's Coach: Lionel Scaloni (Argentina Men's National Team)

- The FIFA Puskás Award: Marcin Oleksy (Poland/Warta Poznań)
- The FIFA Fair Play Award: Luka Lochoshvili (Georgia/Wolfsberger AC/U.S. Cremonese)
- The FIFA Fan Award: Argentinian Fans

Footballing legend and global icon Lionel Messi took home the award for The Best FIFA Men's Player following Argentina's historic FIFA World Cup 2022™ victory in December, inspired by the Paris Saint-Germain FC forward.

FC Barcelona Femení's Spanish midfielder Alexia Putellas was recognised as The Best FIFA Women's Player for the second year in a row after a successful year which saw her club win a third successive league title.

Mary Earps was voted The Best FIFA Women's Goalkeeper after a year in which she lifted the UEFA Women's EURO

2022 with the Lionesses. Argentina shot-stopper Emiliano Martínez got his hands on The Best FIFA Men's Goalkeeper prize following his outstanding performances throughout FIFA World Cup 2022.

The English national team's manager Sarina Wiegman won The Best FIFA Women's Coach after leading the Lionesses to European glory and her second successive UEFA EURO title, while Argentina boss Lionel Scaloni added The Best FIFA Men's Coach to his trophy cabinet, alongside the FIFA World Cup trophy.

The Best FIFA Football Awards ceremony also recognised the standout goal of the year as Marcin Oleksy won The FIFA Puskás Award for his impressive finish. Georgian player Luka Lochoshvili picked up The FIFA Fair Play Award in recognition of his exemplary reaction whilst playing for Wolfsberger AC when an opposing player fell unconscious on the pitch and Luka rushed to his aid.

In addition, Argentinian fans were recognised for their support of the national team during the FIFA World Cup 2022, which saw impressive numbers travel to Qatar and millions of fans then welcomed their winning heroes home to Buenos Aires and across the country.

The winners of The Best player, goalkeeper and coach awards were determined through a voting process in which four groups had an equal say: football fans, selected media representatives and the captains and head coaches of national teams from around the globe.



Daniela Porcelli / SPP

Yuki Nagasato: Why I've stepped away



Japanese footballer Yuki Nagasato has taken to her blog to discuss why she decided to step away from the national team.

The Chicago Red Stars player made 132 appearances for her country but has stated that she chose to be “silent about it until now”.

The statement said:

I've stepped away from the national team since 2016. I was selected for the national team camp by the new head coach for the first two camps including the friendly match against the USA right before the Rio Olympics.

At the second camp after we lost 0-3 against Sweden, I told the new head coach that I would rather play only for the club team for a while, nothing more than that. But there was more than that. I could not tell her the feeling of truth, and she accepted anyway.

I stepped away from the national team with my own decision and without public announcement. Maybe I could've chosen to stay in a different way but I didn't have energy and motivation to keep up with trying to make it a better place for the future.

It was a really tough decision to make. And I choose to be silent about it until now.

Why I've stepped away because I felt this is not the place where I was supposed to be. In Particular, we got treated like not professional players by the new coaching staff which was one of the biggest reasons I decided to leave.

There was no respect for players as professionals both on & off the field. There was no right evaluation for players. There were disrespectful things for human beings. There was no standard

supposed be set up at the national team level. This lack of professionalism made me really exhausted. I don't know how professional I am, but I've learned it through my entire professional career for over 20 years in 5 different countries by now.

And then I realized this is the way of the federation which they want to treat us, and I got the feeling that I should not be here. And also the other things were building up which I posted about it the other day as well. I lost the value for the national team which I used to have. This is what I felt personally and I was still 28.

For 7 years I've been silent. But I don't want to be silent anymore. Because I noticed that to be silent doesn't solve the problem. And I want the national team to be the most professional environment and they show the attractive performance with their professionalism which the kids and younger generations want to look up to, they could play there with respect in the future. And I hope they will have an impact on people around the world.

This is just what the value I have for the national team. And I believe that there are things that must be cherished no matter how the times change.

I was honored to represent my country and I was so proud of wearing the jersey, and it meant a lot to me. My soul and heart were always there.

I was so grateful to be surrounded by people who have great spirits on the national team since I was 16 for 12 years. The time we fought together was unforgettable. They made me feel so special. And will never forget about it. I will say again and again, **THEY ARE SPECIAL PEOPLE FOR ME.**

Renard announces international retirement



France captain Wendie Renard says she will not play at this summer's World Cup.

She has criticised her country's football system and it is expected that manager Corinne Diacre will be sacked imminently.

Renard has made 142 appearances for her country but has said she is taking a step back to "preserve my mental health".

Team-mates Kadidiatou Diani and Marie-Antoinette Katoto later announced they would no longer play for France.

Diani said the "management" of the team was a reason behind the decision.

Renard and Diani, 27, both played for France during February's international break, which saw them retain their Tournoi de France title on Tuesday.

In response to the players' announcements, the French Football Federation (FFF) said no individual is bigger than the France team.

Renard said on social media: "I wore the blue, white and red jersey 142 times with passion, respect, commitment and professionalism. I love France more than anything.

"I'm not perfect, far from it, but I can no longer endorse the current system, far from the requirements required by the highest level.

"It is a sad but necessary day to preserve my mental health.

"It is with a heavy heart that I write this message to inform you of my decision to take a step back from the French team. Unfortunately, I will not play in this World Cup in such conditions.

"My face can hide the pain, but my heart hurts and I don't want to hurt any more. Thank you for your support and respect for my decision."

Paris St-Germain forward Diani later posted on Twitter: "Following the press release from our captain Wendie Renard, and in view of recent results and the management of the French team, I have decided that I will stop playing for my international team in order to focus on my club career.

"I am France's biggest supporter, so if the necessary changes finally happen, I will resume playing for the tricolour jersey."

Fellow Paris St-Germain striker Katoto, who has been out injured since last summer, also announced her decision on social media.

"I am no longer in line with the management of the France team nor the values it promotes," she said.

The NWSL returns



By Peter Mann

Following the success of last season (2022), in what was the tenth anniversary of the National Women's Soccer League, are preparing later this month, to go again.

The opening round of matches take place on Saturday 25, and Sunday 26 March, with two matches, between that of North Carolina Courage (finished seventh) and Kansas City Current (finished fifth), and the San Diego Wave (third last time) against Chicago Red Stars (sixth), taking place on the Saturday night.

The NWSL Champions, Portland Thorns, and the Shield winners, OL Reign, will kick off their campaigns the following day, the former at home to Orlando Pride, and the latter at the Washington Spirit, who were runners-up in the Challenge Cup when losing 2-1 against NC Courage.

Meanwhile, speaking of the Challenge Cup, a tournament which will run from April to September, sees the leagues' twelve clubs, split into three groups of four, an East, Central, and West division, that particular part of the competition running through to August, ahead of the knockout stages.

The competition therefore sees the following divisional set-up –

EAST DIVISION – NY/NJ Gotham, North Carolina Courage, Orlando Pride, Washington Spirit

CENTRAL DIVISION – Chicago Red Stars, Houston Dash, Kansas City Current, Racing Louisville

WEST DIVISION – Angel City, OL Reign, Portland Thorns, San Diego Wave

In the opening round of matches, on 19 April, defending champions North Carolina Courage, are away to Orlando Pride.

There has been a number of coaching changes as well, in the league, four of the five incoming being English; Seb Hines taking over permanently at the Pride, Mark Parsons joins the Spirit, the both happening in early November, Sam Laity was appointed at the Dash (replacing Juan Carlos Amoros), and Mike Norris is the new number one at the Thorns.

Juan Carlos Amoros, having previously been interim manager at the Dash, has taken charge at NY/NJ Gotham; of the Brits, Hines is former, professional footballer who moved to Orlando, to play for their men's team, in 2015, before joining the coaching set-up, for the Pride, in 2020.

Parsons is a vastly experienced coach who, having spent a number of years fronting Chelsea Reserves, headed stateside in 2012, leading, among others, to numerous successes between 2016 and 2021; Laity joins the Dash from a club he spent a decade at, the OL Reign; Norris steps up to HC at the Thorns having previously been assistant manager, having spent a number of years in the Canadian national team set-up, moving to the country back in 2006.

Now though, it's all eyes on the opening weekend, later this month, with the afore-mentioned, two games, on the Saturday, and a further four, the Sunday, they being as follows –

North Carolina Courage vs. Kansas City Current; San Diego Wave vs. Chicago Red Stars (25 March)

Washington Spirit vs. OL Reign; Portland Thorns vs. Orlando Pride; Houston Dash vs. Racing Louisville; Angel City vs. NY/NJ Gotham (26 March)

Meanwhile, dropping back a few months, and the turn of the year, the ongoing situation surrounding systematic abuse in the NWSL, continues to rumble on.

In October 2022 the Yates Report, entitled "Report of the independent investigation to the US Soccer Federation concerning allegations of abusive behaviour and sexual misconduct in women's professional soccer," was published; it being a 170+ page documentation produced by the United States Center for SafeSport and commissioned

by the United States Soccer Federation (USSF), investigating claims presented between the summers of 2019 and 2020.

With the league celebrating its tenth anniversary, the findings of the report were damning to say the least, and it continued to rumble on, into early 2023 at least, the initial report stating that: "Of those claims, it administratively closed 515 cases, put 115 cases on administrative hold, and closed 720 claims based on jurisdiction.

"Of the 1,509 claims, just 122 led to a formal resolution, whereby SafeSport completed its investigation and either closed the matter or issued a decision finding a violation of the SafeSport Code.

"In other words, SafeSport reached a formal resolution in just 8 percent of all the cases it investigated during that period."

The fallout though didn't go down to well in certain quarters, some outlets stating that the use of SafeSport was, in theory, a "false front," and that it was: "little more than another cover-up operation, a litigation-avoidance ploy and bottomless pit in which to dump complaints and disguise inaction."

Then came a secondary report if you will, this time from that of a Joint Investigative Report (released December 2022), and which led to the NWSL Commissioner, Jessica Berman, imposing bans, suspensions and fines, as well as outlining conditions for work, in response.

Primarily these were in relation, on the main, to that contained within Section V,

and to which the NWSL Commissioner said: "The league will continue to prioritize implementing and enhancing the policies, programs and systems that put the health and safety of our players first.

"Those actions are fundamental to the future of our league, especially as we build a league that strengthens our players' ability to succeed and prosper on and off the pitch.

"As part of our commitment to accountability and deterrence, the league has determined that further corrective action with respect to certain organizations and individuals identified in the Joint Investigative Report is appropriate and necessary."

For clarification therefore, the following, four individuals, have been permanently excluded from the NWSL: Paul Riley, Christy Holly, Rory Dames, and Richie Burke (Level One Sanctioning); whilst Suspension and Future Employment Conditional status has been placed, for a two-year period (until 9 January 2025), on that of Craig Harrington and Alyse LaHue.

Other sanctions, and the distribution of fines, across the NWSL, topped by that of Chicago Red Stars \$1.5 million, and Portland Thorns \$1 million (both franchises were placed up for sale).

Now though, it has to be, all eyes on the new season, clubs defending their titles, and players from the recent draft, new signings, across the league, looking to make an impact.

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