

# TW/FM

— THE WOMEN'S FOOTBALL MAGAZINE —

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The Women's Football Magazine is a monthly, digital publication which celebrates women's football in the UK from grassroots to the home nations. Helen has been editing the magazine for five years. In that time she won Sports Journalist of the Year 2019 and has been nominated twice for EVA Business Woman of the Year. She is a mother, wife and an avid Blackpool supporter.



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# *Editor's Note*

*Welcome to our April 2023 Magazine*

There has been so much going on in the women's football world at the moment, it's hard to keep up - but in a good way of course! From new sponsorship deals, the closest Barclays Women's Super League title race ever, transfer rumours and international matches, it's hard to keep up. This issue we have some fabulous interviews with Laura Coombs, Carrie Dunn, Sarina Wiegman and many more as well as all the latest from your favourite teams and nations. The Women's World Cup is fast approaching and I don't know about anyone else but I am sure glad that I do not have to be the one to decide which 23 England players to take with me. There is going to be some amazing talent left behind. It's not just the World Cup which is getting closer, the FA Cup final is nearing and a record crowd looks likely at Wembley. I always love FA Cup final day, it's one of my favourite days of the year in the women's football calendar. It always makes me proud to be part of this.

I hope you like our new branding and design. After six years we thought it was the perfect time to add a bit of colour and spice to our old design. We are six years old this month and I would just like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has bought a magazine and supported our business. We love what we do but we would be nothing without our amazing customers so thank you. On that note we have recently reviewed our pricing and actually SLASHED our prices so make sure you check out the emails you have been sent about this.

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**Helen Rowe-Willcocks**  
Editor-in-chief

# LAURA COOMBS



When your name hasn't appeared on an England announcement in three years, it's easy to think that your time on the international scene is over.

That is just how Laura Coombs felt.

Over eight years since her last Cap, and three years since she was called up to a 30-strong training camp, Coombs was shocked to discover that Sarina Wiegman had named her in the squad for the Arnold Clark Cup.

Sitting in an ice bath with fellow Manchester City player Bunny Shaw, Coombs was told the shock news.

"I was so surprised," she told *The Women's Football Magazine*.

"I didn't really think about the international scene anymore. If I am honest, I was looking forward to the break. It was a shock but I was pleased for the chance to be able to show what I can do.

"It's not that I had given up. In my earlier career it was all I wanted but when I didn't get called up I had to at some point just think and focus on my club football.

"I parked the international call-ups because otherwise you get to a point where it upsets you so much that it starts to negatively affect you.

"It's an amazing honour to wear an England shirt.

"I had no idea that I was being watched for an England call-up. As far as I was aware I had not even been on standby and that is the natural progression.

It turns out that Coombs actually missed Wiegman the first time she rang, "Sarina had tried to Whatsapp call me on the way in but because it was an unknown number, I didn't answer!" she added.

Since Mark Sampson gave Coombs her first call-up in October 2015, the Lionesses have had four managers (including interim managers).

Under Phil Neville's reign, Coombs was brought into a training camp with another 29 players.

After not getting called up again, the Manchester United midfielder put her thoughts about gaining Caps to one side.

"That camp I came into it was just a training camp and I think there were about 30 of us. They were taking a look at me and I didn't get asked back. To avoid the disappointment each time the squad comes out you have to not play as that call up as your end goal. It's a weird feeling but it's a sensible one."

Coming in on the back

of a European Championships victory was never going to be easy, but the pressure and commitment of the players and staff is something which Coombs is enjoying at St. Georges Park.

She said: "The sessions when you come to England are always really intense. It's nice to be back around some old teammates but you get used to a level of play with your club and then it is upped another level again when you come in to England.

"It feels really good to be back in an England kit. I know a lot of the girls so it wasn't too daunting and out of my comfort zone. It's a new environment and lots of different people.

"It's weird because I am the oldest player here and I have never been that player in the team before.

"The England set-up feels so fresh, the talent level is just so high. I just feel that as a senior player, I feel more comfortable than I did in the past.

"It's a really positive place coming off the back of the Euros. The media and visuals around St. Georges have come on leaps and bounds since I last sat and did press in an England top.

"When it comes to training you

know you are going to be tested every day and it's great to be a part.

"I have had a couple of meetings with Sarina. She seems really approachable and that's what you want in a manager. You want someone to be able to talk to. She has told me the type of player she sees me as so I know how she wants me to play. Playing for club and country is slightly different so I need to blend both."

Coombs has been a vital part of Manchester City's side this season as they continue to push for the Barclays Women's Super League title.

The midfielder feels like she has been playing her best football this season: "I feel really comfy at club level this season. I feel like I am being pushed by the people around me and the manager and I feel really valued by the team.

You can train and play a lot better when you are in that sort of head space. I think when I am on a good roll, I have been trying to keep that going."

Looking at how Coombs has grown as a player in that time, it's clear to see why she has been back on the England rider.

"I think I have grown as a

as a person since then.

"I feel like I was still a kid back in 2015 when I was in the squad. I think I was really shy. I still am a little bit but now I feel much more confident as a player and as a person.

"It really helps being in the place I am with club when I have had that gap keeping up my



confidence in my football. It's a real positive environment, and everyone is always helping you build yourself up on a daily effort.

"I just kept saying to myself that if I was playing to the best of my ability then I was doing my best. I have felt disappointment over the years but if I was playing my best at club level then that was enough for me.

This has been one of my best seasons, I am in a really good place."

The final friendlies before the Women's World Cup squad have now been played so with the last few games in the WSL left, there are not many more opportunities to convince Wiegman and her team that you deserve a place on the plane to Australia.

Whilst the tournament gets closer and closer, Coombs is refusing to think about whether or not she will be going.

"I am not thinking about the Women's World Cup at all. I am just going to keep playing as well as I can and take the opportunities I can. I just feel really lucky and privileged to have this opportunity. All the players have high expectations of themselves.

"The players are all so competitive. We all know that we have to play our hardest between now and selection as there is so much competition for space. I don't think I will be in the squad but if I give my all then that's the best I can do.

"I will work as hard as I can. It would be incredible knowing that my last Cap was eight years ago.

"I don't think there would be many other players out there with that sort of story. It is something that I thought would have passed for me but I can always dream."

Coombs story is the perfect example of why you should never give up. It would have been easy to presume you would never see her in an England again but not only has she been named in two

consecutive England squads, her season in the domestic league has been equally impressive.

For England she has medals for both the Arnold Clark Cup and Finalissima.

At Manchester City as well as signing a new two-year contract - on the same day - she received her call-up for England

- she was also named PFA Fans Player of the Month in December.

Coombs does not have long to find out if she will be going to Australia but it is safe to say that this season will always be looked back on as one of the best of her career.

If you were ever in doubt, never give up on your dreams.





# BARCLAYS WOMEN'S SUPER LEAGUE

# Taylor back with the Gunners

**Words: Paul Donegan**

Jodie Taylor recently joined Arsenal for a second spell at the club, signing until the end of the 2022/23 season.

The forward had previously played for the Gunners between 2016 and 2017. Since then, she has played in Australia, the United States and France.

Taylor has also been capped 51 times and scored 19 goals for the Lionesses. She left San Diego Wave in February after their first season in the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL). Taylor came on to make her second debut for Arsenal in the 82nd minute of their recent 5-1 win over Tottenham Hotspur in the north London derby. After that match, she spoke to the media.

Taylor was asked how surreal the last few weeks have been. She answered by saying it has been a "very surreal and crazy 10 days" and that she was just "chilling in LA



Gia Quilap/SPP

like a month ago". She added that anything can happen in football and you have to be ready for it, and that "I am absolutely thrilled to be here, so happy to be part of the team".

She felt the north London derby felt like "a real football game" and said that she has been keeping an eye on the league since she left. Taylor noted the Barclays Women's Super League (WSL) has "gone from strength to strength each season, and it is great to see the growth of the game especially off the back of the Euros success".

Taylor thinks Arsenal head coach Jonas Eidevall just wants her to play her game and settle in, "the team needs me, I am here for it and a great opportunity for me to come in back on home soil". Taylor noted she is still fit, healthy and capable of playing at this level, and she is there to help the team win trophies.

With it being the NWSL off-season, Taylor has been working with

a personal coach. She said she has been staying fit and this has involved doing "a lot of running, a lot of conditioning, a lot of gym, a lot of individual training and small group stuff". She mentioned it was about getting her body right and hopes what she has been doing has prepared her.

Taylor said she can use her experience and "pass it on to other players". She noted that she likes that role and got into the later stages of her career by "helping the young ones coming through". She added that she is a team player. She continued by saying that "it is an important message for older players, it is not over till it's over, and I am still going". Taylor finished by saying "I am happy to be here, really happy with how the squad have welcomed me", and observed that she has played with Caitlin Foord and Steph Catley before and there are a handful of girls that are still with the Gunners from her previous time at the club.

# The WSL title race: The key players

Words: Abby Smith

There are only five points between fourth place Arsenal and first place Chelsea, with the two Manchester teams in second and third separated only on goal difference.

The title race is wide open and, with around two months to go until the end of the season, it's still anybody's game. Here are the key players that can edge their team closer to the title.

## **Arsenal- Leah Williamson**

Arsenal currently have 32 points in 14 games. They currently have a game in hand, something that is not to be overlooked when considering their chances of finishing within the top two.

Players such as Leah Williamson, Stina Blackstenius, Katie McCabe, and Frida Maanum are on top form this season.

Williamson is a rock in defence, a



Dylan Clinton/SPP

no-nonsense player who gives her all for the team. She isn't afraid to commit to a risky tackle if it means stopping an attack and winning back possession; she leaves everything on the pitch whenever she plays. Having just recovered from an injury that side-lined her for three months, the defender is more determined than ever to bring The Gunners back to top form. Williamson scored Arsenal's 4th and final goal in their recent game against Reading, her first for the club in year.

Caitlin Foord's fancy footwork unlocked the Reading defence, allowing her to fizz the ball to Blackstenius on the edge of the six-yard box. Her shot was parried deeper into the box by Reading keeper Grace Moloney, straight into the path of a hungry Williamson who tapped the ball into the back of the net. Through her cutthroat performances, she must now be

one of the first names on the team sheet for both club and country.

## **Manchester City- Khadija 'Bunny' Shaw**

Currently third in the WSL after winning four and drawing one of their last five games, The Blues are hot on Manchester United's tail. The Academy Stadium is home to many of the league's current greats; Khadija 'Bunny' Shaw, Chloe Kelly, and Lauren Hemp just to name a few.

Bunny is a smart player. She knows the exact position she is expected to be in every time the ball travels into the opposition box. Often, Bunny scores with her head. She sets herself up, blue shirt in a sea of white or red, and breaks away from the crowd as the ball floats towards her. She leaps, pushing away from her enemy and connects perfectly with her head, sending the ball flying into the net. In moments of brilliance,

though, Shaw dribbles through the opponents, ball glued to her feet as she inches closer to the edge of the box. She strikes the ball perfectly with her laces, sending goalkeepers diving the wrong way. Recently, Shaw has become City's highest-scoring women's player across a single season after scoring her 26th goal of the season (in all competitions). She is the top scorer in the WSL with 15 in 15, averaging 1.04 goals per 90 minutes. She sits atop the table, ahead of in-form attackers like Rachel Daly, Alessia Russo, and Sam Kerr. Not only is she lethal in front of goal, she is also selfless, racking up 4 assists so far.

### **Manchester United- Alessia Russo**

Hoping to regain their spot at the top of the WSL table, the Red Devils are only two points behind league leaders Chelsea. With the squad depth and talent to pull this off, the final few games of the season are key to their success. Since the official team promoted to the WSL in 2019, a year after officially being founded, United have been consistently finishing within the top four.

England international Alessia Russo has played a key role in United's title charge, scoring eight goals in 13 games, including her first United hat-trick in their 5-1 victory over Leicester City in March. Her first came after just 15 minutes; a controlled tap in amidst a scramble in the six-yard box.

Her second came after Ona Battle met Ella Toone's sublime

through ball on the outskirts of the box. Russo met Battle's pinpoint cross, heading the ball downwards past Janina Leitzig. Her third of the game came from a corner. Russo met the flicked-on ball inside the six-yard box and struck it over a fallen Leitzig. Russo uses her dynamic pace to slip away from defenders and find pockets of space, making runs that less tactical opponents couldn't have foreseen. She is magical on the ball, seemingly creating chances every time she gets a touch. With the heroic Mary Earps between the sticks, Millie Turner and Maya Le Tissier a brick wall at the back, strong midfielders Toone and Katie Zelem pulling the strings, and Russo a goal machine up top, it isn't unrealistic to predict that this United side will go down as one of the best in years to come, even so early on in their WSL career. As it stands, the Red Devils might just pip Chelsea to the post.

### **Chelsea- Lauren James**

First-place side Chelsea are a strong side. It is no surprise that they are current favourites to take home their 4th WSL title in a row with such unique players, a flawless system, and a dedicated manager who lives and breathes her club.

Forward Lauren James may only be young but she is already taking the WSL by storm. So far this season, James has scored 4 goals in 11 appearances. Her goal against Tottenham where she picked up the ball, weaved it past one, two, three outstretched legs with her

silky skills into the box and let fly from the penalty area, won Goal of the Month in February. James' USP is her dribbling; she is a snake winding across the pitch dodging her predators and heading straight for her prey.

No matter how many opponents stand in her way, James will always find a way through, pulling a step over or a fake shot out of her locker.

The forward was the stand out performer in this year's Arnold Clark Cup. James' sumptuous cross set up Daly's towering header in their 2-1 victory against Italy as well as assisting Chloe Kelly in their 6-1 win over Belgium.

But it didn't stop there. She took home the NXGN Player of the Tournament award, scored her first senior goal, and lifted the cup for England. Prior to the tournament, James' place on the plane to the World Cup was in question; now there is no question that she will be on of the first names on the team sheet.

In seasons to come, Lauren James is going to consistently be one of Chelsea's top performers, winning Player of the Season and Goal of the Season awards.



# Spurs take the points

By Paul Donegan



James Holyoak/SPP

Tottenham picked up their first win and points in the Women's Super League since late October as they beat Leicester City 1-0 thanks to Bethany England's stunning second half goal. The win in Vicky Jepson's first game as interim head coach sees Spurs move up to ninth position in the league and five points clear of bottom side Leicester.

Jepson had replaced the sacked Rehanne Skinner after Spurs 2-1 defeat to Liverpool at the weekend. She made one change from that match with Eveliina Summanen coming into the starting eleven in place of Mana Iwabuchi.

Leicester's form had picked up since the start of the year with them picking up seven points since then. Willie Kirk also made one change from their game at the weekend, which was a 0-0 draw against Everton, with Missy Goodwin replacing Remy Siemsen.

The Brisbane Road pitch didn't look great with a fair

bit of sand in places. There was persistent rain during most of the match as well.

Leicester had a lot of the ball early on, but it was the home side had the first effort at goal when Kerys Harrop's shot was easily caught by Janina Leitzig. Apart from that, the first 30 minutes lacked any other chances or real quality with the final ball lacking and both sides giving the ball away or putting it out of play.

Hannah Cain had Leicester's first attempt at goal but this too was easily saved. Straight away at the other end, Rosella Ayane saw a shot go wide, and then one stopped by Leitzig as the game livened up a bit just after the half hour mark.

During the two minutes of added time at the end of the first half, Tottenham had a couple of chances. England played in Summanen but Leicester blocked the effort behind for corner. Summanen headed the resulting corner wide just before

the half time whistle was blown.

Leicester started the second half well but didn't create much until they had a few chances in quick succession. Cain forced Tinja-Riikka Korpela to make save in the 63rd minute. From the corner, Sophie Howard saw her header saved then Ruby Mace hit the crossbar from rebound.

England gave Spurs the lead in the 65th minute with a sensational goal. She cut in from the left-hand side and sent a shot from the corner of the penalty area into the top corner of the net. The quality of the goal went against what had happened during the majority of the match so far.

Both sides had chances after that with Ayane playing in England but her shot was easily saved. For the visitors, Siemsen put an effort narrowly wide following a cross from Cain. Leicester then had a couple of efforts blocked before Spurs went straight up the other end but second half substitute Kit Graham put a

shot wide in the 78th minute.

Ayane played another great through ball to Celin Bizet but she put her shot wide as the home side looked to seal the win. Ayane, who I thought had been superb, got a great reception from the Tottenham fans when she was taken off during stoppage time at the end of the match.

Mace and Monique Robinson had opportunities for the visitors during additional time but neither found the back of the net. Spurs celebrated when the final whistle was blown as they ended their nine game losing run in the league.

Vicky Jepson, Tottenham's interim manager, said that "it's fantastic, three points, it relieves a little bit of pressure but still seven games left" when speaking to the media after the win. She believed the goal gave confidence to the whole team. Jepson was happy with the clean sheet, saying "it is everything" and added that it is "incredible from the defenders, midfielders and goalkeeper who made some incredible saves tonight."

Leicester manager Willie Kirk said after the match that he "thought the second half was end to end, could have gone

either way and disappointed it didn't go our way". He thought they could have defended the goal better. Kirk noted that they have got to be "clinical" with the chances they have during games.

**Tottenham Hotspur** (4-2-3-1) Korpela, Neville (c), Turner, Bartrip, Harrop, Summanen (Bizet 59'), James, Spence, Karczewska (Iwabuchi 45'), Ayane (Ubogagu 90'+5), England (Graham 72')

Unused substitutes Spencer, Cho, Ale

Goal - England 65'

Booked - Bartrip

**Leicester City** (4-1-4-1) Leitzig, Eaton-Collins (Pike 77'), Howard, Plumptre, Nevin, Mace, Green (Robinson 87'), Whelan (c) (Siemsen 64'), Tierney, Cain, Goodwin (Jones 64')

Unused substitutes Lambourne, Level, Purfield, Smith

Referee - Yoshimi Yamashita



James Holyoak/SPP

# Change at Spurs

Vicky Jepson has taken over charge over Tottenham.

The news was announced that Women's First Team Head Coach Rehanne Skinner had been relieved of her duties.

Andy Rogers, Managing Director, Tottenham Hotspur Women, said: "Since joining us in 2020, Rehanne has played an integral role in our development in the women's game, both on and off the field."

Jepson said: "The last 24 hours have been difficult and emotional for myself, the staff and the players. We all love Rehanne and she built some fantastic foundations here and professionalised the Club to get us to where we are.

"To see her exit the building was a tough pill to swallow, but every single one of us will be so grateful and never forget the great things that she did at this Club and the foundations that she built."



James Holyoak/SPP

APRIL PRINT  
MAGAZINE OUT NOW

Featuring Emily Ramsey, Mo Marley, Rebecca McKenna and Rebecca McAllister and a look at the next generations in the lower leagues with Gillingham and Yeovil



# BARCLAYS WSL NEWS



## West Ham criticise club over lack of stadium use

Defender Lucy Parker has criticised her own club today for failing to facilitate a match for their women's team at the London Stadium.

Parker was responding on Twitter to the Hammers' announcement that the men's under-18s team will play their FA Youth Cup at the stadium.

Parker wrote: "Taking nothing away from the lads because they more than deserve it after their year, but when will we get a game at the stadium? Only WSL side not to have a game at the men's stadium and haven't played there since 2019."

## Anniversary for major achievement in English football

March marked 38 years since the Lionesses' second-ever captain Carol Thomas made her 50th appearance for the England squad.

The Hull-born right-back became the first England women's player to earn 50 caps. She said: "On March 17, 1985, I became the 1st Lioness to win 50 caps .... it's still sinking in Sir Tom Finney presented me with my cap (hand-made by the late Flo Bilton)."

## Final day of WSL being moved

The final day of the WSL season has been moved to prevent a clash with the Premier League.

Both leagues were initially due to play their final games on Sunday May 28, but the WSL will be brought forward, with all games now kicking off at 3pm on Saturday May 27.

The title is still up for grabs with four clubs battling it out for the trophy. Will it be Manchester United, Manchester City Arsenal or Chelsea?



## Duggan announces birth of baby girl

Everton's Toni Duggan has announced the birth of daughter Luella. Duggan announced her pregnancy in September and has not played for Everton since last year but she will be the first Barclays Women's Super League player to benefit from new maternity cover.

An agreement between the Football Association (FA) and the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) led to the introduction of legislation at the beginning of this season allowing players to take maternity leave with full pay and any other remuneration for the first 14 weeks.

Before the agreement, clubs could be given maternity leave, but it wasn't compulsory.

# Woman Up - Pitches, Pay and Periods

By Helen Rowe-Willcocks



Carrie Dunn is well-known in the women's football world.

A writer and journalist who has covered the last three Women's World Cups for the Times and Eurosport, she is a regular voice on BBC radio as well as The Athletic's Women's Football Podcast.

She has a PhD in sport sociology, and her particular research specialism is in women's experience of sport. Her recent books include *Unsuitable for Females: The Rise of the Lionesses and Women's Football in England* (Arena Sport, 2022), *The Pride of the Lionesses* (Pitch, 2019), nominated as Football Book of the Year in 2020, and a sequel to *The Roar of the Lionesses: Women's Football in England* (Pitch, 2016), one of the Guardian's best sport books of 2016.

Dunn's latest book 'Woman Up' is an inspirational account of women's football's painful past

and its exciting future, including first-hand accounts from leading female players.

We chatted to Dunn about the book and how women's football has changed since she started writing about it.

**Firstly, please could you tell us a bit about the book and what it is about?**

'Woman Up - pitches, pay and periods: the progress and potential of women's football' is essentially the history of women's football globally through an exploration of the challenges its players have always had to face and overcome in order to succeed. That's everything from access to facilities and infrastructure to the way that the sport is still physically set up for men with kit, boots, socks and shin pads all designed for male bodies.

**What inspired you to write the book?**

I love to tell people's individual

stories and I love shining a light on success, and I thought it would be fascinating to look at how success has been achieved in different eras and how different women have grappled with the same issues. Also I think that sometimes because we are so set on accentuating the positive, we can forget that there are still plenty of problems we've got to solve so that women's football can truly thrive.

**You have been one of the names of women's football media for years how have you seen things change?**

Ha! That makes me feel old. But yes, we've come a long way from the first seasons of the WSL, let alone the years before that. How nice it is not to have to explain to a sports editor who the England captain is!

**I love that you are shining a light on the issues still surrounding women's football, do you think that the Lionesses success is meaning these**

**issues are not being talked about and ignored by the media?**

I don't think it's necessarily a deliberate decision to ignore issues. There are still very few reporters focusing on women's football and only women's football, and it inevitably means they have to concentrate on what's required, and that's usually what's going to sell - the Lionesses, their success, and their celebrity will definitely do that.

I'm very happy to be able to contribute what I can and tell the stories of some players further back in history as well as those playing now but further down the pyramid so that more people are aware of what the entirety of women's football looks like.

**What is your hope for the future of women's football?**

I guess my big hope is that we don't stop here! 2022 was great, 2023 should be even better, and we can't rest on our laurels.

**You are part of Aberystwyth Town, what do you think are the main issues/concerns for women's football in Wales?**

I love being part of Aber Town Women. I've been the volunteer head of media and comms for this season, which has essentially covered everything from tweets on matchday to putting together sponsorship packages, and one

of the things I've loved being able to do is set up a mascot programme - getting little girls in the community to come along, walk out with the first team, and perhaps step on to a football pitch for the first time.

They might not go on to play in the Adran Premier themselves, of course, but now they know that women play football and it's important and exciting - they've got new role models and new inspiration that they can achieve their own dreams, whatever they may be.

Boosting attendances in the Adran Premier consistently has to be a next step for all clubs, but that's something that'll happen slowly but surely - it happened that way with the WSL, and look at them now.

**Do you think telling the stories from the past is important for people to see how far the game has come?**

I absolutely think that, but I also think telling the stories of the past is important so that people can understand WHY the game has come this far as well.

I think the Lionesses did a great job of acknowledging that - that they wouldn't be where they are without the women who fought so hard to be able to play.

Christian Müller, Commissioning Editor, added: "I am very excited to be working on this project. Carrie's expertise on and passion for women's football really shine through in this fascinating and eye-opening book. *Woman Up* is both an accessible primer on how we got to where we are today and a call to action on the challenges and inequalities that still persist."

The book will be published in the UK on 26th October 2023, building on the excitement of the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup in the summer. World rights were acquired by Christian Müller, Commissioning Editor of Hero Press, from Melanie Michael-Greer from the Michael Greer Literary Agency.



# QUESTIONS



DO YOU HAVE ANY RITUALS OR SUPERSTITIONS BEFORE A GAME?

I HAVE KIND OF LOST THEM ALL. I AM NOT THE MOST RELIGIOUS PERSON BUT I TEND TO SAY A PRAYER WHICH I USED TO SAY AT SCHOOL AS I AM WALKING OUT.

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY YOUR CAREER HIGHLIGHT IS SO FAR?

SCORING AT ANFIELD DEFINITELY.

WHO IS THE BEST PLAYER YOU HAVE EVER PLAYED AGAINST?

LAUREN JAMES, SHE IS ONLY REALLY YOUNG BUT I THINK SHE IS UNBELIEVABLE. SHE IS SO HARD TO PLAY AGAINST AND I DREAD TO THINK WHAT SHE IS GOING TO BE LIKE IN A FEW YEARS.

DO YOU HAVE ANY SET PRE-MATCH FOOD?

SOMETIMES I DON'T HAVE THE APPETITE SO SOMETIMES I JUST FORCE SOMETHING DOWN ME. IT'S USUALLY A BAGEL BUT THE TOPPINGS CHANGE.

WHO WOULD YOU SAY YOUR BEST FRIEND IN FOOTBALL IS?

I HAVE TWO. GABBY GEORGE AT EVERTON BUT ALSO TAYLOR HAYNES AT LIVERPOOL.

WHAT IS THE HARDEST MOMENT OF YOUR CAREER SO FAR?

LAST SEASON I SPENT TIME OUT OF THE TEAM WHICH WAS COMBINED WITH THINGS GOING ON OUTSIDE OF FOOTBALL. THE KEY TO PLAYING WELL IS BEING HAPPY OUTSIDE OF FOOTBALL AND THEN YOU CAN DEAL WITH WHATEVER FOOTBALL THROWS AT YOU.

WHO WOULD YOU SAY IS THE MOST SKILFUL PLAYER AT EVERTON?

I AM GOING TO SAY AGGIE BEEVER-JONES. SHE JUST BOSSES IT.

WHO IS YOUR BIGGEST SUPPORTER?

MY MUM AND DAD FOR SURE.

WHAT IS THE DRESSING ROOM ATMOSPHERE LIKE BEFORE GAMES?

IT'S QUITE CALM. WE'RE NOT A ROWDY BUNCH. WE GET IN THE ZONE.

IF YOU WERE NOT A FOOTBALLER, WHAT WOULD YOU BE?

MY MUM ASKS ME THIS ALL THE TIME. I LOVE SKIING SO MAYBE A SKI INSTRUCTOR!

Megan  
Finnigan

# BARCLAYS WSL NEWS



## Maier to leave Everton

Everton defender Leonie Maier will leave the Barclays Women's Super League club at the end of the season to return to Germany.

The 30-year-old, who has made nine appearances this season, will join Frauen-Bundesliga side Hoffenheim when her contract expires.

The Germany right-back joined Everton from Arsenal in July 2021.

Maier played for Bayern Munich from 2013 to 2019, winning two titles, and helped Germany win Euro 2013.

## Schuer leaves Brighton

Jens Scheuer has left his position as women's head coach by mutual consent with immediate effect.

Scheuer leaves with immediate effect and Amy Merricks, supported by Perry North-east, will take interim charge.

Technical director David Weir said, "Together with Jens we've not reached this decision lightly. While we appreciate he has given his all in the role this feels like the right step forward for all parties involved."

## Hemp in love with hometown mural

Manchester City and Lionesses star Lauren Hemp has hailed her hometown mural "awesome".

An image of Manchester City forward Lauren Hemp, was put on the side of Cafe Kitale in North Walsham.

The painting, which stands about 7m (22.9ft high), was created by street artist Mr Meana. "She responded 'awesome'," Mr Scammell said, and has since put the picture on her Instagram account, saying it was 'mad'."



## Skinner confirms he has extended his contract at United

Marc Skinner has confirmed the option has been "taken up" to extend his contract at Manchester United.

Skinner was out of contract at the end of the season but will remain at the club for at least another year after an extension to do so was triggered by the club.

"I'm so focused on the games, but I'll be as honest as I possibly can. There's an option in my contract and the option (of an extra year) has been taken up so it's already set for next year" confirmed Skinner.



# BARCLAYS CHAMPIONSHIP

# Rebecca McKenna

**By Zoe Tisdale**

Rebecca McKenna gained her first senior Northern Ireland cap at just 17 years of age. Now, with 20 plus caps to her name and still only 21, she continues to make her mark in the NI team whilst being a full-time professional with Lewes FC. I sat down and chatted to Rebecca about her humble beginnings with Bangor Ladies to becoming the next generation of rising stars for NI.

**Take me back to where it all began.**

I feel like I was a late burner in comparison to some other players. I was about 10/11 years of age and my brother played for our local team Bangor Rangers. I went along to his training one night and they asked me if I wanted to play for them. That was how it started, playing with the boys, which I feel really helped me develop as a player. The boys were a lot tougher, and I got used to the physical side, when I got tackled, even if it hurt, I just got straight up and got on with it. I played with the boys team until I wasn't allowed to anymore due to my age, from there I moved to Bangor Ladies at the age of 15.

**Tell us about the move to Linfield which was so successful and where you won so many titles and trophies.**

I was away at NI camp at the time and at underage level there were so many Linfield players in the NI squad. It started off as a joke that I would join them at Linfield, but I decided to go along to one of their training sessions and really enjoyed it. My confidence was still low at this point after making the step up into Premiership and for me it just felt like the right move. I obviously knew lots of the players and I think joining Linfield was a real turning point for me in my career. I started to enjoy playing again, which I was struggling to do, my confidence just grew and grew, I was thriving in that environment. As a player confidence is everything, people don't realise what an impact it has on your game, when you are high in confidence you just enjoy playing so much more and obviously play so much better.

Once I had one good game, I just kept pushing on from that and because I was playing better, I started getting call ups for the NI squad more regularly which helped my confidence even more.

**How did playing as a full time professional in the Championship with Lewes FC help develop you as a player and prepare you for the Euros?**

It was such a step up from the Premiership back home to the Championship in England, but it really helped me grow as a person both in and out of football. The speed and tempo of the game is so different and obviously playing in the Euros against some of the players that I had already played against in cup games etc, having that experience really helped me and being full-time was so beneficial to my development.

**Back to your first season at Lewes FC, it couldn't have gone any better being awarded players player of the year and managers player of the year. How did you feel when you first made the move? Were your homesick at all?**

I was expecting just to get better as a player coming over making the step up to the Championship, but I grabbed the opportunity with both hands and once I got settled and into a rhythm. I started playing really well and kept the momentum going and thankfully it paid off at the end of the season. I was homesick for the first couple of months but not so bad that I ever wanted to come home, I knew it was an amazing opportunity and I wanted to give myself a chance to settle and make the most of it. After Christmas I just kept pushing myself out of my comfort zone and kept on working hard. As much as I miss home sometimes, I am just living in the moment and enjoying every single minute of it. Home is not that far away, a 40-minute plane journey and lots of my family and friends come and visit to watch me play, especially my dad, he is my biggest supporter and always has been.

# Back to winning ways



Alexander Canillas / SPP

## By Paul DoneganL

London City Lionesses returned to winning ways on Sunday as they beat Lewes 3-1 in the Barclays Women's Championship.

The Lionesses goals all came during the first half with Sarah Ewens, Shanade Hopcroft and Kyra Carusa scoring them. They were reduced to ten players with just over 15 minutes left when Lily Agg was sent-off. Ellie Mason scored a late consolation goal for Lewes.

London City Lionesses' interim head coach Nikita Runnacles was away on international duty with England's under 17s. They made two changes from the side that had lost to Sheffield United last weekend with Grace Neville and Carusa coming in for Lucy Fitzgerald and Karin Muya.

Scott Booth made three changes for Lewes from the starting eleven that had beaten Sunderland with

Amber-Keegan Stobbs, Isobel Dalton and Emily Kraft replacing Rhian Cleverly, Nat Johnson and Emma Thompson.

On a fairly pleasant afternoon at Prince Park, the home side took the lead in the 7th minute.

Lewes tried to play out short from a goal kick which Carusa charged down and the ball fell to Ewens who finished into the top corner.

Lewes' first chance came in the 12th minute but Mason put the ball well wide of goal. Kraft had another effort for the visitors two minutes later but this one went over.

London City Lionesses made it 2-0 in the 17th minute when Hopcroft's in swinging corner went straight in despite the efforts of a Lewes defender on the line who tried to keep it out.

Jamie-Lee Napier had a couple of efforts for the hosts but saw Sophie Whitehouse save her shot

in the 27th minute, then seconds later saw a shot blocked by Lewes' defence. Hopcroft put a long-range free kick wide before Carusa had the ball in the net for the Lionesses but it was ruled out due to a foul in the build-up.

Both goalkeepers then made saves with the home sides Shae Yanez stopping a Mason shot in the 34th minute, and Whitehouse denied Napier at the other end three minutes later.

In the 38th minute, the hosts made it 3-0 when Ewens picked up a loose ball in midfield, passed to Carusa who finished from the edge of the area with a lovely shot to score her first goal for London City Lionesses.

Lewes made a double substitution at half time with Nat Johnson and Grace Palmer coming on for Dalton and Kenzie Weir. This led to a change in formation with them switching to 4-3-3 and Stobbs playing further forward.

After making these changes, the visitors had the first couple of chances of the second half with Mason putting an effort wide, then Yanez caught a long-range free kick from Amelia Hazard.

Napier's first time shot for the home side went wide in the 59th minute. Mason saw a shot saved as Lewes looked to get back into the game.

Yanez then stopped a looping effort from Stobbs in the 71st minute.

Agg was shown a straight red card by referee Isabel Chaplin for an off the ball incident in the 74th minute.

Mason scored the Rooks consolation goal in the 83rd minute when she headed in Palmer's cross into the corner of the net. Yanez made a good save as the match entered stoppage time when she tipped away Mason's header.

Speaking after the game, Lionesses Sarah Ewen said: "After a disappointing result last week, it's great to bounce back," explained the 30-year-old shortly after the final whistle was blown.

"I thought we were excellent in the first half - we put them

under a lot of pressure because our press was excellent. We're obviously disappointed to concede in the second half, but we're delighted overall.

"We just need to keep working hard in training and take this into next week."

**London City Lionesses (3-4-3)**

Yanez, Bennett (c), Rodgers, Nolan, Neville, Hopcroft (Kitching 90'+3), Agg, Joel, Ewens (Muya 77'), Carusa, Napier (Primus 77')

Unused substitutes: Cull, Shepherd, Fitzgerald, Heuchan

Goals - Ewens 7',

Hopcroft 17', Carusa 38'

Sent-off - Agg

**Lewes (3-5-2)**

Whitehouse, Weir (Johnson 45'), Wardlaw, Barton, McKenna, Stobbs (Thompson 77'), Hazard, Dalton (Palmer 45'), Howells, Mason (c), Kraft

Unused substitutes: Moore, Cleverly, Copus-Brown, Pursey, Longhurst, Mushtaq

Goal - Mason 83'

Booked - Wardlaw

Referee - Isabel Chaplin



Suze Eyles/ SPP

# The title race continues

By Peter Mann



Alexander Canillas / SPP

With the league title and promotion to the Barclays Women's Super League (WSL) at the forefront of everyone's minds, it remains a four-horse race at the top.

Just three points separate the top two of Bristol City and London City Lionesses with third place Charlton Athletic and fourth placed Birmingham having both played a game less.

League leaders Bristol City extended their advantage to six points at the beginning of March, but defeat to their title-challengers, reigned them back in as the top two witnessed mixed fortunes during the month.

Grace Clinton has been on fine form for Bristol City scoring a brace in their 3-0 win away to mid-table Crystal Palace and another the week later against Charlton. History was made for the Robins with Abi Harrison's goal against Palace once again extending her record as the

Robins' all-time leading scorer.

The top two met in the capital on March 19 with London City coming out on top. Atlanta Primus bagged both the goals in the second half to secure an important 2-0 victory. The win was crucial for the Lionesses after their month had started with defeat to Sheffield United and then Lily Agg was sent off in their 3-1 win against Lewes the week after.

In the last game of the month, Bristol City came back with a bang beating Southampton 1-0 on the road. Ffion Morgan's goal after just 18 minutes was enough to take the three points back to Bristol. The win proved even more important when London City fell to a 3-0 defeat to seventh placed Durham meaning the gap between the top two is back up to six points.

Birmingham City move up into third place after an unbeaten league run in March. Despite

going 1-0 down in their opening game against Blackburn Rovers, the Blues fought back to win 2-1 thanks to goals from Charlie Devlin and Libby Smith. The result was slightly marred by Harriet Scott's second yellow card just before full-time.

Third met fourth in the middle of the month with Birmingham and Charlton sharing the points. Jade Pennock got hosts Birmingham off to a flying start just after the half hour mark with Louise Quinn doubling their advantage. Charlton didn't back down though with Kiera Skeels and Melissa Johnson getting on the scoresheet to level things up.

Darren Carter's side finished up the month with a 3-1 win over Crystal Palace and a 1-0 win over bottom side Coventry United - their seventh clean sheet of the season.

Three draws and a win also

meant Charlton finished March unbeaten. Melissa Johnson grabbed a hat-trick in their 4-1 win away to bottom club, Coventry United, whilst also picking up points at home to Southampton (1-0), away to Blackburn Rovers (1-1) and home against Sunderland (2-2).

Manager Karen Hills was perhaps left rueing not taking the three points against Blackburn, and, after playing twice in three days, she said: "It is a missed opportunity that we couldn't get the three points but we are sitting third in the table and we have suffered some really harsh injuries this season to some key players and I think that hasn't helped the situation. But I can't be more proud of the group that goes in week in and week out - training and working hard for each other. If I'm honest we deserve to be where we are. We are a good side, and we have some quality players and fantastic individuals but overall as a team we fight to the death and you see that in games like (Blackburn)."

Southampton have been impressive in their first Championship season but have had a difficult month. A 1-0 defeat at Charlton was followed by a goalless draw at home to Blackburn, and a 1-0 defeat against Durham. Their final game of the

month came at home against league leaders Bristol City with the hosts falling to a 1-0 defeat. After a mixed month, Crystal Palace have drawn level with Southampton above them. Two wins and two defeats for the Eagles sees them sitting three points above Durham. Coral-Jade Haines scored the only goal of their 1-0 win away at Sheffield United whilst Molly-Mae Sharpe found the back of the net against Blackburn Rovers in their final game of the month.

There was also a change in management at the club in the middle of March. Dean Davenport being replaced, on an interim basis, by Mike Lowne. The Eagles boss is one of three members of staff at the club, suspended, pending an investigation into their conduct after a complaint was raised - Davenport has been at the Selhurst Park club from nineteen years, and the last decade as manager.

Durham meanwhile, got the month off to a good start with a 5-1 demolition job on visitors Coventry. Saoirse Noonan and Jess Clarke got them two-up at the break with Lily Crosthwaite extended the home sides' advantage after the restart. The bottom club pulled one back before the hour but Durham added further goals through Rebecca Salicki and Deidre Bradley.

After a hard defeat to league-leaders Bristol City, Durham were back to winning ways thanks to Rio Hardy. Her goal was enough to grab them all three points at Southampton. Hardy was on the scoresheet again in an impressive 3-0 victory over promotion hopefuls London City. Beth Hepple and Sarah McFadden added the other goals before half time.

A positive for the north-east side in recent weeks has been the return to the squad of Lauren Briggs; having picked up an injury in pre-season. The long-serving player said in a recent interview for the Durham website that: "It's been fantastic to be out on the pitch with the girls again. "You're in a difficult situation when you're out injured for a long period of time, but I think you get that fire in your belly to get back again. It's amazing to be back now and I'm really pushing to be in the squad and hopefully the starting eleven. It's great to be out in front of the fans as well."

Meanwhile, down in Lewes they started the month with an important win against Sunderland. Ellie Mason found the net just after the hour mark but it wasn't until injury time that Kirsty Barton added the second.

The Rooks boss, Scott Booth, said after the game, "We always

talk about the fact that every competitive game in the Championship is difficult. During any game in the Championship, you're never that comfortable. There were times we could have put the game to bed, the second goal obviously did that so it would have been nice to do that a bit earlier but two goals and a clean sheet, I'm happy with that."

Nearing the bottom of the table Sunderland had a strong month losing only once. That loss came to the side just above them in the table Lewes but a strong win against Coventry the week after made up for it. Katy Watson netted the opener midway through the first, Abbey Joice added the second within ten minutes of the restart, and Brianna Westrup wrapped up the win shortly after.

A further point was added to their tally when hosting Sheffield United, Joice again on the score-sheet, she equalising with twenty minutes remaining. In their final match of the month, the Blackcats scored an injury-time goal to insure the points were split against Charlton.

No wins in March for Black-

burn Rovers summed up a tough month for the Lancashire side.

Defeat to Birmingham City was followed but a goalless draw at Southampton and 1-1 draw to Charlton. Cloe Williams opened the scoring minutes before the break but they were pegged back in the second half. Rovers finished the month with a 1-0 defeat to Crystal Palace.

Sheffield United also continue to struggle, sitting second bottom in the table but they started the month in fine form beating London City Lionesses 2-1 with goals either side of half-time from Courtney Sweetman-Kirk and Mia Enderby.

That win by the Blades, over one of the title contenders, boosted the confidence of the recently arrived manager, Jonathan Morgan. He's already promised fans they'll see positivity in his sides play, and attacking football to match.

It came after that victory, Morgan saying that: "You're going to come and see a team that won't fear anybody, home or away. We're going to respect all our opponents, because they're all good in their

own right, but we won't fear them.

"That lack of fear allows us to play with a lot more freedom and a lot more creativity. It allows the girls to express themselves a lot more on the pitch.

"That's something I've been really clear and direct with to the players, to make sure they have that feeling that when they step over that white line, they can play their football to the best of their ability.

"If they do that then they entertain the fans, and if they entertain the fans, everybody's happy and we get the results."

Bottom-side Coventry failed to get any points on the board in March as they continue to slip further away from those above them. Defeats to Durham, Sunderland, Charlton and Birmingham made it a tough month for the struggling side.

They did score in two of the three losses mind you; Isobel Goodwin netted in the 5-1 defeat in Durham, and Morgan Cross in the 4-1 home loss to Charlton, the other defeat being a 3-0 result at Sunderland.



# CHAMPIONSHIP NEWS DESK



## Palace make double signing

Crystal Palace have signed defenders Leanne Cowan and Emily Wilson-White.

Cowan re-joins the Eagles after having played for them last season in the Women's Championship when she made 15 appearances. The left-back said "It's amazing to be back - part of me feels like I'm home again.

Wilson-White joins from Bridgwater United and said: "This is an amazing opportunity for me."

## Pennock wins double awards

Jade Pennock won both the Women's Championship Player of the Month and Goal of the Month awards for February.

The goal award was for one she scored against Lewes.

After winning the awards, Pennock said "Personally, I'm buzzing with the awards, but my focus this season was to do what I could to help the team."



## Smith named Manager of the Month

Bristol City's Lauren Smith has been named as Women's Championship Manager of the Month for February. Smith's side picked up seven points out of nine during the month.

Smith said after winning the award "Our performances on the pitch have spoken for themselves recently, but it's always nice to receive recognition. This award is for the whole team of staff who have been working tirelessly to get us into the position we're in and I'm pleased to be able to collect it for them all."





# Thomas-Arayo earns promotion with Lionesses



Luke Thomas-Arayo has been promoted with Barclays Championship side London City Lionesses.

The Islington-born tactician joined London City as Development Squad Coach during the pandemic but saw his role shift quickly after former Head Coach Melissa Phillips departed to Angel City FC.

"I've always been a massive believer in learning being the most important thing," Thomas-Arayo told the official website.

"When Melissa was here, I was fortunate to be able to come in, observe first team sessions, and learn from what I saw.

"When Melissa left the Club, I was offered the opportunity to step onto the training pitch to help out in any capacity that I could – whether that was session planning or delivering parts of the practice.

"From there, it just developed and I was asked if I would like to join the coaching staff full-time – which is an opportunity I'm extremely thankful for."

Thomas-Arayo was officially promoted to Interim First Team

Assistant Coach duties earlier this month and experienced his senior debut away at Brisbane Road versus Tottenham Hotspur in the Vitality Women's FA Cup. But he didn't allow himself to be knocked off balance in the moment.

Thomas-Arayo has since become a crucial member of the team at Princes Park and jumped into a leadership role while Interim Head Coach Nikita Runnacles was away on international duty with England U17s.

Still, his approach to life in the dugout remains the same thanks to two pieces of quality advice.

"I worked with an excellent basketball coach at Barking Abbey College and he has a saying that has always stuck with me," explained Thomas-Arayo.

"It's that you always have to 'sweep the sheds' – which basically means you are never too big to do the small things.

"It's about constantly wanting to do everything you need to do to give the players the best possible platform to perform.

Thomas-Arayo has made an undeniable impact at London City, with the Lionesses hurtling into the final weeks of the season with a spring in their step. And his future is bright, after a long journey to Princes Park.

"I started coaching as a 15-year-old," the Londoner explained, "and the club I was at back then felt I could use my leadership skills with the younger age groups.

"And that kind of set my career progression on the path that it's been on.

"I think the most important thing to do is to live for today but plan for five or ten years into the future.

"I would say that it was my plan five or ten years ago to be here, but I take each day as it comes and make sure I do the little things to make sure I end up where I want to be.

"It's all about progress, not perfection, for me.

"I think as long as you continue to progress in what you want to do and you're continually striving for perfection, you will eventually get there."



# THE FA NATIONAL LEAGUE



# Newcastle gain silverware

Newcastle United Women's development team beat Portsmouth Women's development side to win the FA Women's National League (FAWNL) Reserve Plate.

A first-half effort from Jasmine McQuade put the young Magpies firmly in the driving seat heading into the break, before Sharna Wilkinson doubled the lead shortly after the restart. Georgina Spraggon put the icing on the cake deep into injury-time with a well-taken finish, putting the result beyond any doubt.

Newcastle dominated the final from the first whistle, and lifting the trophy following the triumph was no more than Vacher's side deserved for putting in a professional performance way beyond their years.

Speaking to [nufc.co.uk](http://nufc.co.uk) immediately after the match concluded, the development team's

manager said: "Winning on any occasion is a tremendous achievement but to win in the way that the girls did today, I couldn't be prouder of them.

"It was an absolutely dominant display from the off and that continued all the way through to the final whistle, so to come away with the trophy today meant a lot to me, meant a lot to the girls, and hopefully it will mean a lot to the club as well."

McQuade, who was named the FAWNL Player of the Match, added: "It's the first final I've been in as well, and for the girls to come through (and win is brilliant).

"A lot of them are quite young and for us to win the whole tournament and every game, with none of them going to extra-time, we're just buzzing about it, and obviously to be handed Player of the Match is nice as well."

## Portsmouth Women development team

Maisie Aldridge, Chelsea Burr, Skye-Louise Granger, April Hill (Jessica Toft, 85), Jade Hockey (Esme Parsons, 70), Gemma Luke (Nancy Sanderson, 65), Ruby Saunders, Jessica Soares, Macey-Nikiah Walters, Aimee Woodard, Libby Kingshott

## Newcastle United Women development team

Frankie Hackett, Erin Nelson (Molly Wilcock 66), Sharna Wilkinson (Ava Chapman 76), Jess Spark (Georgie Leech 31), Jasmine McQuade, Amy Hargrave, Ebonie Knox (Georgina Spraggon 50), Mel Brooks, Libby Corney, Lily West (Sophie Curle 57), Emily Bloomer

Goals: Jasmine Mcquade, 38, Sharna Wilkinson, 47, Georgina Spraggon, 90+3

Attendance: 125



Burnley FC Women

# FOR THE LOVE AND FUTURE OF THE GAME

After announcing their plan to professionalise their women's team in 2021, Burnley have grown from strength to strength. Lola Ogunbote became Burnley FC Women's first business lead, overseeing all aspects of the club, including personnel, budgets, and day-to-day operations. Here's the story of Burnley's rise.

Words: Megan Firth

Burnley FC's Head of Women's Football Lola Ogunbote has always loved football.

Growing up in East London, she went from playing toe to toe with the boys in the playground to being offered a football scholarship while studying at university.

She dreamed of a career in football, but with a lack of pathways visible to her, she pursued an impressive career in law instead.

"I got to a stage of my career where I felt that I wouldn't be happy doing it for the rest of my life. I thought: 'If I were to die today, would I have any regrets?' and the answer at that time would have been yes because I never pursued football."

Then she met Rachel Yankey

by chance one day in a lift.

"Is it too late for me to pursue football?" Lola asked the legendary Lioness.

"No chance, go for it," Yankey responded.

Lola quit her job that week and the then-26-year-old turned her head toward football coaching by joining The Arsenal GAP Programme.

After gaining her FA Level 1 and 2 coaching qualifications through the programme, Lola coached young people in communities across Australia, South Africa and Mozambique partnered with the project.

"That was a phenomenal experience. It confirmed that I wanted to be part of the game and that

I had made the right decision."

It was during this time that solidified Lola's love for football and her appreciation for how the game can transform the lives of young girls around the world.

"When I think about my time in Mozambique - arguably one of the poorest countries in the world - football is an outlet. It's hope; it's a way for kids to escape their reality which isn't always positive."

"It gives them a positive distraction to handle a challenging life dealt to them just by default of the circumstance they're born in. Football can change that for them."

With international coaching under her belt with Arsenal, Lola moved on to China and began



coaching at Beijing's largest grassroots football academy.

Her experience with coaching girls across the world motivated her to join Goals for Girls, an NGO which inspires girls to make changes in their lives and become leaders.

"For those girls, football is a way for them to learn about life; you learn how to be a teammate, how to follow direction, how to win, how to lose. All of those are life skills that are transferable outside of the game."

"Nelson Mandela was the one to say that sport has the power to change the world. It really can, I've seen how football

can transform the lives of young girls particularly, in this country and abroad."

In the UK, Lola notes how the Lionesses winning the Women's EUROs on home soil in the summer of 2022 opened doors into football for young girls.

"They can see the pathway to being a Beth Mead or a Leah Williamson. They can see it and so they have the opportunity to want to be it." The EUROs gave people an outlet to go that extra step further and help girls have more access to the game."

10 years after her chance meet- ing with Rachel Yankey, Lola has

10 years after her chance meeting with Rachel Yankey, Lola has now moved off the grass and is now the Head of Women's Football at Burnley FC where she is helping realise chairman Alan Pace's vision of professionalising the women's team.

Part of this strategy is provid- ing a foundation for the wom- en's team to thrive. The Burnley FC women now have access to nutritionists, a purposely-built gym, a club psychologist, medical insurance and vital infrastructure around the team which has allowed them to perform at the top of their league.

The Clarets experienced their first league defeat in over a



**“We want fans to feel like they are an extended part of the family”**

calendar year to Nottingham Forest at the beginning of the month, the end of a winning streak which shows testament to the environment Burnley FC are creating to support players in becoming the best player they can be.

Lola has high aspirations for the Clarets, setting their sights on not just being promoted to the Championship but eventually playing in the WSL as well.

“We have ambitions to be at the top and be the very best that we can. We have the backing of the board, the chairman and the staff to put that infrastructure in place to put Burnley FC women on the map.

“We want to play in fully-packed stadiums. We want to be pushing to compete against the best of the best and I believe we have the potential.”

This ambition is fuelled by the dedication and vision of chairman Alan Pace, who has committed to ploughing extra funds and infrastructure into supporting the women's team.

It's also powered by the fans, who Lola regards as an extension of the club.

“Fans are a huge part of the club. We want to engage with our fans, particularly in a place like Burnley where it's a small town and everyone knows everyone.

“It's got that family feel. We want fans to feel like we're an extended part of their family.”

Extending beyond their local community, Burnley FC also engages with fans they don't share a doorstep with by live streaming their games on TikTok, which has hit 1M unique impressions.

“We'd never get that attendance in person but we've been able to interact with those people online via the game. It's brilliant to see the appetite for it and our job is to continue to feed that appetite.”

Burnley FC has also partnered with Burnley College to provide a designated

pathway for local girls to pursue a professional football career alongside their education.

“For someone like me who wants to do law and play football, that’s now an avenue for her to explore.”

With this, Lola is part of a movement that is making pathways into football visible for young girls to explore. The opportunities that organisations

like Goals for Girls and Burnley FC are providing are helping future footballers walk through the doors that have been opened by the Lionesses.

As Lola states: “Football isn’t just a sport for a particular demographic, it’s a sport for everyone. It’s just a matter of us gaining access to it.”



## Burnley FC Women nets one TikTok million views

Burnley FC Women has bagged one million views of its TikTok LIVEs, just two years after the club announced a unique multi-season partnership with TikTok.

The Clarets became the first UK football team to stream games live on the platform - an unprecedented move for a club in the FA Women’s National League - with TikTok also becoming the club’s first shirt sleeve sponsor.

Since the start of the partnership, football fans around the world have rallied behind Burnley FC Women by tuning into their matchday TikTok LIVEs, with thousands of viewers per game.

The team’s success on TikTok has helped Burnley FC Women engage both existing and new fans, while helping the club

new TikTok communities outside football. This has contributed to commercial benefit off the pitch, including greater financial investment from Burnley FC, with a brand-new state-of-the-art gym currently being built specifically for the Women’s team.

As part of the tie-up, TikTok also delivered special training for the Burnley FC Women players to help them get the most out of the platform and showcase their personalities, creating the first ‘creator football team’. This has seen viral content from Burnley players, ranging from Lauren Bracewell’s goalkeeper masterclass in catching the ball, to the team hosting a TikTok takeover of the UEFA Women’s Football account during the Women’s EUROs. Several TikTok creators have also collaborated

with the team, including @you1stlondon, who took on a fitness challenge with the squad.

Beyond helping Burnley FC Women to grow its own fanbase, the partnership marked TikTok’s first major move into women’s sport in the UK, paving the way for our landmark Title Sponsorship of the TikTok Women’s Six Nations and partnership with UEFA for the Women’s EURO 2022..

Marcus Mellor, Head of Commercial at Burnley FC, said that: “We are so proud to achieve this amazing milestone. Working with TikTok to bring a whole new product in football broadcasting not only helps us in achieving greater awareness of our women’s team, but will hopefully contribute to the continued growth of women’s sport.”

# Wimbledon announce new Women's Football Academy

AFC Wimbledon Women have teamed up with HRUC (Harrow, Richmond and Uxbridge Colleges) to offer a platform for aspiring footballers to shine.

The launch of the Women's Football Academy will provide an opportunity for students to develop their football skills.

At the same time the students will be able to study towards their BTEC or A level qualifications.

The A level programme is split into 2 years. In Year 1 you will study Pearson BTEC Level 3 National Foundation Diploma in Sport. In year 2 you will study Pearson BTEC Level 3 National Extended Diploma Sport.

The website states: "Our focus is to not only develop your performance as a player, but to also achieve academic excellence.

"We balance training with your academic commitments,



ensuring you can meet your potential in both areas, leading to a wider range of progression opportunities through university, apprenticeships or employment with our Football development partner AFC Wimbledon.

AFC Wimbledon Women's General Manager Sophia Axelsson, who was part of a panel when 80 current students visited the Cherry Red Records Stadium recently, said: "We are all about development at AFC Wimbledon Women.

"Not just on the pitch, but off the pitch too. By partnering with HRUC, we can take this a step further – jointly providing a platform for young minds to develop future careers and a path towards first-team football."

Sijul Miah, Head of School of Business and Industries at Richmond upon Thames College, said: "I am delighted to be working with

AFC Wimbledon Women's team and General Manager, Sophia Axelsson, to launch the Women's Football Academy to develop this partnership, bringing new opportunities for our students.

"Our partnership is designed to give students access to industry leading training and education, tailored to individual needs with clear sights of career progression and development. We aim to nurture and develop students into professional athletes of the future."

An official statement from AFC Wimbledon said, "We are so proud to launch our own Women's Football Academy. It's an exciting venture."

More information about the course, how to apply and what the requirements are can be found on the Richmond upon Thames College website.

# NATIONAL LEAGUE NEWS



## County into Cup final

Stockport County are through to the Cheshire FA County Cup final after beating Crewe Alexandra 6-0.

Two goals in quick succession in the first half from Lily Murphy and Rachel Davison put them in a dominant position. Murphy bagged a second with a brace from Maria Figueiredo and a final goal from Chloe Howard.

## Bees new shirt sponsor

London Bees has announced a new shirt sponsor with London business Bits Bobs and Odd Jobs.

The sponsorship deal will run between BBOJ and The London Bees, who are based at The Hive London, until the end of the 2023/2024 season.

Daniel Martin, London Bees FC Commercial Manager, said: "A brilliant shirt sponsor is key to success, and we are really looking forward to working with BBOJ over the next two years and building an excellent partnership with them."

## Record at the Pride Park

Derby County fell to a 2-0 defeat to local rivals Nottingham Forest in front of a record crowd at Pride Park.

The Ewe Rams welcomed 5243 fans to Pride Park, beating the record set in the reverse fixture when 5082 supporters visited the City Ground back in October 2022.

## MK Dons in Cup success

MK Dons Women have lifted the BBFA Women's Senior Cup.

The side beat Abingdon United 3-0 in the final with goals from Laura Mitchell and Mollie Coupar.

Speaking to CWSportRadio.com, manager Charlie Bill said: "It wasn't our best but we produced in key moments."

## QPR go back to school

To celebrate International Women's Day Hayley Peacock and Kasha Petit visited local primary schools. The pair held an assembly and Q&A session at Ark Swift Primary.



## Triple signing for Town

Huddersfield have announced the signings of Caz Fields, Keunna Dill and Falone Sumaili.

Fields joins from AFC Fylde, Dill from Chesham United and Sumaili comes back after a short spell away from the Terriers.

Fields said: "I always liked the style of football they played and I think it suits the type of player I am. I'm buzzing to be a part of the group and I can't wait to get started with the team."

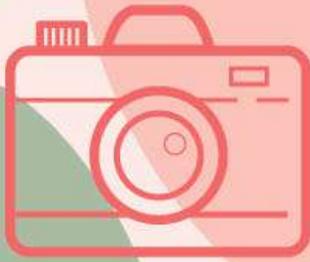


## Peterborough sign York

Peterborough have completed the signing of former Burnley defender Ellie York.

York made eight appearances for the Clarets this season whilst at the club.

Speaking to the official website, York said; " I feel this club is pushing to climb divisions and that's what attracted me to sign for the club."



# Fan Fanatic

A SNAPSHOT OF FAN'S PHOTOS OF THE MONTH



@HerGameToo  
Chelsea fans travel to Lyon



@Matt+CFC85  
Fc Bracknell Lions enjoying a team day out at Kingsmeadow



@KingmanSimon  
Chelsea season ticket holders vs man utd



@Rachmagill\_



@N23Murphy  
Living our best life

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OR TAG US ON SOCIAL MEDIA @WOMENSFOOTIEMAG



Hutchinson family  
at Wembley



Paul D'Onagan at Scotland  
vs Australia

# Scott goes back to her roots

PhotoS: SPORTS PRESS PHOTOS



Xero, the global small business platform and partner of the England Women's Senior Team and England Football, has today released a short film with Lioness Legends, Jill Scott and Rachel Brown-Finnis, which highlights the importance of financial investment and sustainability in women's grassroots football.

The film sees Jill take friend and former England teammate, Rachel, back to the club that helped kick off her professional football journey, Sunderland Women. Starting her senior career in 2004, Jill joined Sunderland at the age of

18, before going on to join Everton in 2006. In the film, she reflects on how special it feels to be back at The Academy of Light and how much has changed since she trained there.

Discussing these changes with her former teammate and current Sunderland Head Coach, Melanie Reay, the pair look back on how they used to have to train in front of car headlights on a field in the back of the grounds - reflecting the lack of investment in the women's sport at the time.

Both Jill and Rachel highlight how much positive change

there has been since then and the opportunities that are available for young women who are now looking to pursue a career in professional football.

An upbeat Jill explains that more can be done and that they are still "trying to encourage more girls to play football, and if we can keep investing in grassroots football, it has such a massive knock-on effect."

In support of this, Rachel adds that "when clubs are well financially managed, it allows the game to grow."

The film has been released as part of Xero's mission to champion women's football and highlight the importance of financial viability at all levels of the game. Xero works closely with the FA Grassroots Team, County Football Associations, and the FA Club Consultants to provide access to a comprehensive range of educational resources for clubs' financial management. It also provides a platform for grassroots clubs to find and connect with local accountants and bookkeepers.

Jill Scott, Lioness Legend

said: "I'm so excited for the future of women's football and where it's going to go next.

"The support for the game is phenomenal, but to ensure this continues we need to see even more participation and more investment in it.

"Ultimately, increased financial support and management means more opportunities for female footballers and clubs to do what they do best."

John Coldicutt, Marketing Director at Xero, added: "It's a

privilege to be able to work with inspiring women like Jill Scott and Rachel Brown Finnis, who are driving support for the women's game.

"The future is bright for the game, but the financial viability of clubs at every level is vital to get even more women into the sport.

"The aim of this film is to share Jill's story and the role of a club, such as Sunderland, in supporting her on her journey to becoming a Lioness."





# GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL



## Puma launch women fit boots

**G**lobal sports company PUMA has today launched the Brilliance Pack, featuring women specific fits for the FUTURE, ULTRA and KING in fresh new colorways. A brilliant fit for brilliant ballers - PUMA is celebrating the brilliance of the women's game whilst looking ahead to the next generation of young female players.

To mark the launch of the Brilliance Pack PUMA is bringing together professional players and grassroots programs, to inspire young girls to play football. Two key activations have already been held in Germany and France with many more to come.

Together with VfL Wolfsburg and German international Lena Lattwein, PUMA collaborated with Golden Goal on March 13 to host a special football day for over 200 children. Golden Goal is a grassroots organization in Germany who support girls from

migration backgrounds to help them integrate into Germany, through football. With that purpose PUMA, Lena Lattwein and Golden Goal created a unique football experience for the girls to inspire them and give them a platform to play the beautiful game.

PUMA partnered with PSG and French international Laurina Fazer on March 15th to surprise Laurina's first football club with a special training session in Paris. Laurina talked to the girls about her journey, tips for becoming a football player and helped take them through various football specific drills with the hope of inspiring a new generation of female football players.

PUMA also hosted activations with Sherida Spitse (Netherlands and Ajax) in Amsterdam, Maya Le Tissier (Manchester United) in Manchester and at the end of March Madelen Janogy (Hammerby IF and Sweden), Jonna Andersson (Hammerby

IF and Sweden), Adelina Engman (Hammerby IF and Finland) and Maika Hamano (Hammerby IF and Japan) will be hosting an event Stockholm.

The aim of the activations is to get girls playing football and bring them together with female role models who inspire them. The Brilliance Pack also provides female players with the right fit and technology to support they're on pitch needs to perform at their best.

"PUMA first introduced a women's specific fit over two years ago and we have continued to refine and roll out this offering across all of our silos", said Stephanie Vieira, Product Line Manager Teamsport Footwear, PUMA.

"We feel it is important to support our female athletes with the best equipment with a fit that is tailored to the anatomical shape of a women's foot."

# GRASSROOTS GOSSIP

ALL THE LATEST NEWS FROM WOMEN'S GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL

## Blackpool win Challenge Cup



Blackpool defeated Bury FC Foundation in Lancashire's first County Cup final. Captain of the side, Alice Earnshaw said after the game: "We have worked extremely hard for this, blood, sweat and tears to get to this final alone. To get a 4-0 win with every player putting their part in, you can't ask for anymore, at all."

## size? sponsors grassroots team

Streetwear retail staple size? are officially the sponsors of Newground United, a grassroots women's team in Manchester, size?'s new sponsorship of Newground United provides the small team with a huge platform to share important stories both on and off the pitch, whilst also continuing to popularise women's football from the ground up.

## AFC Bentley Ladies win the league

AFC Bentley Ladies wrapped up the Sheffield & Hallamshire County League Open Age 1 title in style with a 5-0 win over Middlewood Rovers and an 8-0 victory at Kiveton Park. Whilst the league has finished with Bentley Ladies as champions, they still have chance for more silverware when they play Brunsmeor in the Cup final.

## Accrington Stanley to take on Isle of Man

Accrington Stanley have announced a friendly against the Isle of Man National Women's team. The game will take place on Sunday, April 30 at the Wham Stadium. Tickets start from just £5 and there are lots of other activities planned for families to get involved.

# Notts County secure promotion

Notts County have secured promotion to the FA Women's National League.

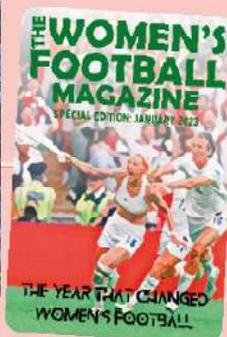
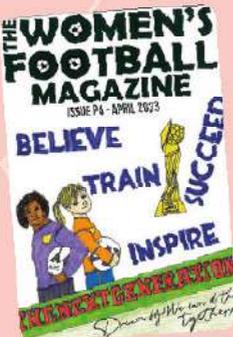
A 3-0 victory over local rivals Mansfield Town ensured they will lift the league trophy in front of a bumper crowd of 1000 people at Meadow Lane.

In an open letter manager Adam Dunleavy said: "It's taken 48 hours for the emotions to settle and to attempt to find the right words for this achievement.

"At the start of this season, we sat down as a group, without arrogance or entitlement, to set our squad culture for the season and our expectations of one another. The players lead this, as we believe is so important for a culture to be driven and upheld, though the good times and the adversity.

"I can't speak highly enough about this incredible group of people we have in the dressing room. The mix of personalities, experiences and differences that unified and made for the most incredible connections I have experienced in my time as a coach. We have 20 players in the squad and it has been by far and away the most competitive squad we have had at the club to date, this meant leaving people out or disappointing individuals on a weekend, but throughout, the group celebrated each-other and wanted the best, always putting the team first.

"This is the start of the next exciting challenge as we step up. There is no better group of people to face it with."





# CUP COMPETITIONS

# Leeds Cup Victory

By Helen Rowe-Willcocks



Leeds United have been crowned FA National League Plate champions.

The FAWNL Divison One North side beat Stourbridge - FAWNL Division One Midlands leaders.

Leeds Women secured their first silverware in 13 years courtesy of goals from Macy Ellis, Abbie Brown and Amy Woodruff in a 3-1 win over Stourbridge.

Midway through the first half, Ellis was in the right place at the right time to put Leeds ahead,

It was not long before Stourbridge equalised through a long-range effort from Hannah Fishwick which went soaring past goalkeeper Carrie Simpson.

After half time, Leeds once again found themselves ahead. Brown's composed finish inside the penalty area was her 14th goal of the season in all competitions.

The final goal to secure victory came from Amy Woodruff,

The win is the first for the club since reuniting under the current Leeds ownership.

Speaking after the win, manager Rick Passmoor said: "It's great to get a Cup run and finish it with victory.

"We have done really well in this competition. We had a lot of nerves, wearing this badge comes with a lot of responsibility.

"We played a lot better in the second half, we created opportunities and we thoroughly deserved the victory."

Defender Paige Williams told LUTV: "It feels unbelievable. It's been a tough year but we worked really hard for it.

"It's been a long journey but this is massive. We have a lot of injuries, the players were working their socks off. We are limited with players on the bench so that puts more pressure on. We knew we were doing something right but we just had to come out and push it further."

Intrinc captain Olivia Smart said to LUTV: "Everyone wants to win a trophy - this one is heavy!

"We started well but we gave a bit too much respect to them in the first half. We showed our experience in the second half and commanded the game.

"Its a credit to the players who turn up each week. We all lead on the pitch, we are an experienced team."

Finally Amy Woodruff added to LUTV: "It feels amazing, I am absolutely buzzing. It wasn't our best game.

"In a Cup final of course you are nervous, it would be mad not to be.

"At half time we said that we needed to move the ball a bit quicker and we did that second half. There was some amazing goals, I am not surprised at that, they score incredible goals week in, week out.

"It just feels absolutely."

# Chelsea and Arsenal impress in Europe

Words: Helen Rowe-Willcocks

Both Chelsea and Arsenal have made it through to the Uefa Champions League semi-finals.

Chelsea had a scare against holders Lyon at Stamford Bridge but a dramatic penalty shoot-out saw the Barclays Women's Super League (WSL) successful.

Chelsea went into the second tie with a 1-0 lead and controlled long parts of the game.

It was not until the 77th minute that Emma Hayes' side began to tire. Lyon's goal from Canessa Gilles leveled things up and forced the game to extra time.

Lyon took the lead through substitute Sara Dabritz when she drove a finish into the far corner after 110 minutes.

It was an extraordinary end to a thrilling two-legged tie after



Following a Video Assistant Referee (VAR) review, referee Ivana Martincic deemed Lauren James had been fouled by Vicki Becho and Maren Mjelde stepped up under pressure to fire home the spot-kick and set up a shootout climax.

Mjelde's controversial penalty in the final seconds breathed life into Emma Hayes' side and the Norwegian then stepped up first to convert in the shootout.

James, who had earned the extra-time spot-kick, was denied by Lyon goalkeeper Christiane Endler after Berger had saved Renard's effort.

But Chelsea's German keeper had the final say when she dived to her right to block Horan's strike.

Lyon failed to progress from just their second quarter-final in 14 appearances, while Chelsea's victory

ensured two English clubs in the last four for the first time in five years.

After losing the first leg to Bayern Munich 1-0, Arsenal went into the game at the Emirates Stadium fighting.

Arsenal were intense from the off and blew Bayern away in a scintillating first-half performance.

Frida Maanum scored one of the goals of the season when she struck the ball beautifully into the top corner after being teed up by a flick from Leah Williamson to open proceedings.

Bayern were shaken by Arsenal's relentless pressing and with a record crowd for a women's European match in England in attendance, they struggled to deal with an onslaught of pressure.

Stina Blackstenius capitalised to

make it 2-0 when she headed in from close range and defender Lotte Wubben-Moy almost added a third but her cross clipped the crossbar.

Bayern goalkeeper Maria Luisa Grohs pulled off numerous saves in an inspired performance to keep the scoreline down at half-time, and the visitors did pose a greater threat in the second half.

German midfielder Lina Magull came closest when she had a shot blocked from close range before her header bounced dangerously wide off Arsenal defender Rafaelle Souza.

But Arsenal had done the damage in the first half to record a memorable victory in European competition and they remain in line to win three trophies this season.

In the other two quarter-finals, Wolfsburg beat Paris Saint Germain 2-1 on aggregate whilst Barcelona finished 6-1 overall winners against Roma.

Wolfsburg booked a Women's Champions League semi-final meeting with Arsenal after clinching a narrow 2-1 aggregate win against Paris-St Germain.

Germany striker Alexandra Popp extended the two-time champions' 1-0 lead from the first leg with a stunning opener.

Kadidiatou Diani's goal gave the French side hope but they struggled to convert chances in the second half to level the tie at the Volkswagen Arena.

Wolfsburg held off a late PSG surge in stoppage time to continue their unbeaten run in the Champions League this season.

Fridolina Rolfo scored twice as Barcelona thrashed Roma to secure progression to the Women's Champions League semi-finals.

Rolfo scored either side of Maria Leon's stunning curled strike in front of 54,667 joyous fans at the Nou Camp.

Goals from Asisat Oshoala

and Patricia Guijarro put the Catalan side out of sight before Annamaria Serturini's low drive gave Roma a consolation goal.

Barcelona have reached the Champions League semi-final stage for five consecutive seasons, going on to reach the final three times and winning the tournament once.

Chelsea will take on Barcelona on Saturday, April 22 with the second leg played on Thursday, April 27.

Arsenal start their semi-finals away at Wolfsburg on Sunday, April 23 with their second leg on Monday, May 1.



# The FA Cup semi-finalists have been decided



Natalie Mincher/SPP

The quarter finals of the FA Cup took place on Sunday 19th March. The winners in this round received £25,000 in prize money whilst the losers got £6,250. I headed to St Andrew's Stadium to watch Birmingham City take on Brighton & Hove Albion, here is what happened.

## **Birmingham City v Brighton & Hove Albion**

Brighton reached the semi-finals of the FA Cup with a 2-0 win away at Birmingham. Poppy Pattinson and Danielle Carter scored the goals in a five-minute spell around the half hour mark as the WSL side overcame their Championship opponents. Birmingham can maybe feel a bit unlucky as a dubious penalty decision went against them and they hit the woodwork five times during the match.

Birmingham had reached this stage after wins against Huddersfield Town, Everton and Charlton Athletic. Darren Carter made five changes to the eleven that started their 2-2 draw against Charlton Athletic in the league last week. Harriett Scott, Siobhan Wilson, Lucy Quinn, Charlie Estcourt and Claudia Walker were the ones who came in.

Brighton had reached the last eight after beating West Bromwich Albion and Coventry United. Interim head coach Amy Merricks made five changes to the side that had started their defeat to Manchester City last Sunday. There was a very late change to the starting eleven for this match with Megan Connolly replacing Elisabeth Terland.

After a quiet opening 10 minutes at St Andrew's, Birmingham had the first chance of the game when Jade Pennock, who was named as Women's Championship Player of the Month for February during the week, saw her effort from 25-yards come back off the crossbar. The home side had another opportunity in the 13th minute but Wilson's shot from 30-yards went wide. Three minutes later, Pennock's shot from an angle hit the outside of the post via a slight touch from Brighton's goalkeeper Megan Walsh.

Brighton's first chance came in the 19th minute when Katie Robinson's shot came off the post, hit the head of the diving Lucy Thomas and went behind for corner. Victoria Williams headed wide for the visitors six minutes later.

Brighton took the lead in the 28th minute. Pattinson took an inswinging corner that went directly in despite Thomas' attempt to keep it out.

The visitors were awarded a penalty a few minutes later. Referee Emily Heaslip deemed that Brianna Visalli had been fouled by Jamie Finn close to the edge of the area as she was running out of it. Birmingham head coach Darren Carter was disappointed with the penalty being given, saying after the match when speaking to the media "it is never a penalty". Danielle Carter took the spot kick and scored low into corner of the net.

Birmingham had a couple of opportunities to get a goal back before the break but Lucy Quinn shot over, then Christie Murray saw her free kick hit the wall before being cleared.

In the first minute of the second half, Walsh tipped over Finn's shot. The resulting corner from Murray caused problems before the ball was claimed by Walsh. Pennock shot over in the 49th minute as the hosts made a good start to the half.

Pennock hit the woodwork again for Birmingham in the 53rd minute when her shot from 6-yards hit the crossbar

A few minutes later, Louise Quinn headed wide a corner.

Ashley Hodson, who had only just come on as a substitute, was the next Birmingham player to hit the woodwork when her volley came back off the post before being scrambled behind for a corner in the 70th minute.

Brighton's first opportunity of the second half came a minute later when they broke but Robinson's shot was easily caught by Thomas. Carter's low shot was also saved in the 79th minute. These turned out to be the Seagulls only chances during the second 45 minutes.

In the 88th minute, Walsh made a good save from close range to deny Pennock in what turned out to be the final chance of the game for Birmingham.

The final whistle went shortly after and Brighton made it through to the last four of the FA Cup for the second time in the last three seasons. Interim head coach Merricks said that she was "proud" of the team and they "impressed with some of their play today, and they created some good opportunities".

Darren Carter thought his Birmingham side "were excellent" in the second half and "good in the first half but

a little bit hesitant in their pressing". He added they "were disappointed we've conceded two goals, one we can control and one we can't" but was happy with his players response.

**Birmingham City** (3-5-2)  
Thomas, Scott, Louise Quinn (c), Lawley, Lucy Quinn (Hodson 68'), Finn, Murray, Estcourt, Wilson (Harris 68'), Pennock, Walker (Devlin 83')

Unused substitutes:  
Jones, Simkin, Bourne, Jenner, Worsley, Banaras

Booked - Scott

**Brighton & Hove Albion** (4-3-3)  
Walsh, Fox, Bergsvand, V. Williams (Morse 63'), Pattinson, Bance, Visalli, Zigiotti (c), Robinson, Carter, Connolly,

Unused substitutes: L. Williams, Sarri, Stott, Park, Kullberg, Fergusson, Terland

Goals - Pattinson 28', Carter (pen) 32'

Referee - Emily Heaslip

Attendance - 541

### Round-up of the rest of the quarter-finals

Lewes were the only other Championship side that had reached the quarter-finals. They

took on WSL side Manchester United at The Dripping Pan. The higher tier side won 3-1 with the goals coming from Rhian Cleverly (og), Vilde Boe Risa and Nikita Parris whilst Emily Kraft scored Lewes' consolation goal.

The attendance of 2,801 was not only a record at The Dripping Pan, it was also a record for the quarter-finals of the Women's FA Cup.

Holders Chelsea made it through to the semi-finals with a 3-1 win away at Reading. Jess

Carter, Maren Mjelde and Guro Reiten scored the goals for the Blues. Sanne Troelsgaard got the home sides consolation goal.

Aston Villa defeated Manchester City after extra-time to reach the last four.

Rachel Corsie gave Villa the lead in the 20th minute before Deyna Castellanos equalised for City later on in the first half. Rachel Daly scored the winner in the sixth minute of extra-time for the Villans.

### Quarter-finals results

Reading 1 v 3 Chelsea  
Aston Villa 2 v 1 Manchester City (a.e.t)

Lewes 1 v 3 Manchester United  
Birmingham City 0 v 2 Brighton & Hove Albion

### Semi-finals draw

The draw for the semi-finals has been made and these ties are due to be played on Saturday April 15 and Sunday April 16. Manchester United v Brighton & Hove Albion  
Aston Villa v Chelsea



Suze Eyles/ SPP

# 50,000 for FA Cup final



With 50 days to go until the 2023 Vitality Women's FA Cup Final, The FA confirmed that over 50,000 tickets have now been issued for the showpiece event.

The Final, which will be held on Sunday, May 14 at Wembley Stadium connected by EE, passed 40,000 at the end of February, with a further 10,000 issued in just over three weeks.

A new attendance record for the Final could be set this year, with 49,094 fans witnessing Chelsea's victory over Manchester City in last season's Final.

The Semi-Finals of the competition are due to take place over the weekend of 15-16 April. The draw, held on Tuesday, saw holders Chelsea drawn away to Aston Villa, with Manchester United set to host Brighton & Hove Albion.

## Category Pricing

Category 1 - £30

Category 2 - £25

Category 3 - £15

Concession (OAP/Student) - £10

Junior (Under 16) - £5

Group Adult (9+) - £15



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# HOME NATIONS

# Walsh

## Wonder

By Clare McEwen



Keira Walsh is a phenomenon. Described by Jill Scott as, “the best holding midfielder in the game”, Walsh’s playmaking credentials were secured in last summer’s Euros.

Obsessed with football from an early age, five-year-old Keira began playing with her dad on the common across from their home in Syke near Rochdale. Her first team was Pearson Juniors under-7s, run by her best friend’s dad. She moved on to the Samba Star boys’ team as she got older.

Keira progressed quickly. She was the youngest of the u12s when she joined Blackburn Rovers Centre of Excellence. In the 2014 FA Youth Cup quarter-final against Sunderland, she scored a hat-trick in 13 minutes! At 16-years-old, she moved up to Blackburn’s senior squad, a few months later trialling for Manchester City. Still only 17 - too young to sign a professional contract - she joined City’s first team as a playmaking midfielder. Ten days later, she debuted as a substitute. Whirlwind!

By the end of 2014, she was starting regularly for City, and signed her first senior contract

in 2015. She spent most of that season injured. In 2016, she was back, scoring her first City goal in November against Brøndby IF in the Champions League. She was later nominated for PFA Women’s Young Player of the Year.

During eight years with City, she made 211 appearances and won eight major trophies. Her technical skill - learned from watching Spanish football with her dad - caught the eye of Barcelona who signed her in September 2022.

Keira’s England career began at u15s in 2009 - once more the youngest in the squad. She played at u17 during the 2014 Euros but soon graduated to u19s. In November 2017, she was called up to the senior team for the 2019 World Cup qualification campaign. Her first cap came against Kazakhstan that month where she recorded an assist 15 minutes in. In September 2018, she captained England in a 6-0 win against Kazakhstan - she was still only 21.

In 2018, she played in her first SheBelieves cup, where England came second. The Lionesses won her second She Believes Cup in 2019, helped

Believes Cup in 2019, helped by Walsh’s long-range assist that led to the winning goal.

But the 2019 World Cup was a reality check. Keira didn’t play her best and was subjected to unpleasant online hostility. It dented her confidence, making her re-consider her footballing career. Fortunately, her love of the game triumphed over the trolls.

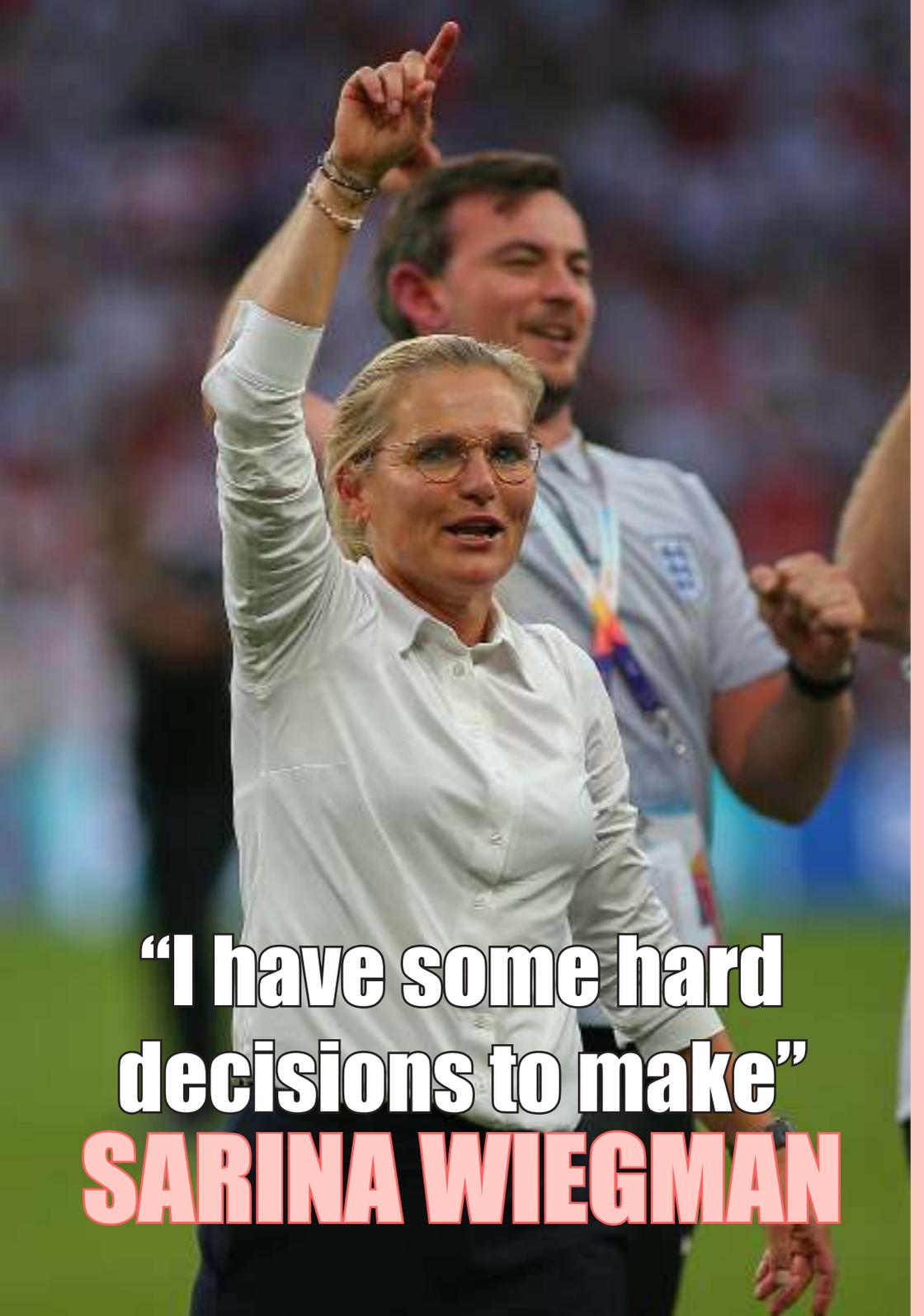
And she really did come back stronger!

She showcased her talent to the world in the 2022 Euros - dominating the midfield, making killer passes, and assisting Ella Toone’s opening goal during the final (helping her earn player of the match).

Since then, she has won her 50th cap for England.

Keira is undoubtedly one of the most accurate passers of the ball in the world, frequently controlling games from midfield.

If you want to learn about football, you could do worse than watch Keira closely.



**“I have some hard  
decisions to make”**

**SARINA WIEGMAN**



With the 2023 Fifa Women's World Cup just around the corner, Sarina Wiegman has some choices to make.

England players are thriving at the moment are there are going to be some difficult conversations ahead for the Lionesses coach.

With Beth Mead desperately trying to come back from injury, Beth England heading to Tottenham to get game time and prove she is ready and four goalkeepers to get down to three, there will be some disappointed players in the summer.

Wiegman named her 25 player squad for the Finalissima against Brazil and friendly against Australia and all eyes are on the players who were called up and those who missed out.

"It was very difficult to select the squad because the depth of this squad is really good," said Wiegman.

"I had to make some very hard decisions and some players came back to play some minutes after injuries, so it was not easy."

The majority of the squad that won the Arnold Clark Cup in February have returned to the fold but Emily Ramsey (missing through injury), Katie Zelem and Ebony Salmon have been dropped.

Arsenal's Lotte Wubben-Moy also originally missed out but was recalled following injury to Chelsea defender Millie Bright.

Wiegman said: "This is the last moment we have [to play before the squad is selected for the World Cup] but after this camp

until the end of the season, there is a lot of football to play so you don't know how it will go.

"So we wouldn't expect much change but you do not know what is going to happen because time goes fast but there is a long way to go."

Many fans were expecting Bethany England, who is in great form at Tottenham, to be included in the squad but she once again missed out.

Wiegman did take the time to talk to the players who missed out on selection this time.

"Of course, I talked to them. They were pretty short and clear discussions because it is not a nice thing to hear that you are not in the squad at this moment. Throughout the year we speak to the

players and give them feedback.

"We will be in contact with them when necessary."

Back in contention for the April squad is Lucy Parker. The West Ham defender was forced to withdraw from the squad in October due to injury so will be hoping to make her debut this time round.

Speaking about Parker's inclusion, Wiegman said: "The competition is really high, and I want to see the players we have in now. Lucy Parker, for example, was in the squad in October but had to leave unfortunately so I want to see her in our environment.

"It starts with the quality of performance and you also want some experience too. I want to see her in our environment.

"We see things in her that we really like. So the defensive aggressiveness, the speed, agility and things like that.

"There is more than that to football but we really like that [about her] and we want to see that in our environment."

Goalkeeping choices is a hot topic for many Lionesses' fans. With only three spots available for shotstoppers in the World

Cup squad, it remains open who will fill them. Mary Earps and Ellie Roebuck are expected to have already booked a place on the plane but the last spot could be taken by Hannah Hampton, Emily Ramsey or Sandy McIver.

Ramsey, who plays for Barclay's Women's Super League side Everton, missed out on the squad through injury but McIver was once again involved (until she pulled out through injury).

Hannah Hampton, who was included in the European Championships winning squad has been out of the mix since with England since.

It was reported that Hampton had been dropped for poor behaviour and an attitude problem but Wiegman has always refused to comment on the speculation citing "personal issues" were behind the omission.

Speaking about her inclusion, Wiegman said: "I said in the other camps that she needed to sort out some personal issues and she has done that.

"She has shown great performances and consistency with her club, so I thought now was the moment to bring her in."

Of the stars currently injured and pushing to get back into full

fitness before the squad travels to Australia is Beth Mead.

The Arsenal star was the highlight of the European Championships last summer and was hoping to go on and wow on an international level once again but an anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injury has seen her sidelined for most of the season and rushing to be back in time.

Whilst Mead remains confident she will be available for selection, Wiegman remains unsure as to whether she will be heading to Australia.

"So what we said is she's not in our plans now, just really take the time to get back well. But if a miracle happens and she goes so fast, then we will reconsider it - but at this moment, I don't expect that.

Chelsea star Fran Kirby also remains a doubt for the World Cup. After withdrawing from the Arnold Clark Cup squad, Kirby has also been missing for Chelsea due to a knee injury.

"Of course, I am concerned because [Kirby] has been out for a while now and it doesn't look like she will be back in a really short time.

"But I want to keep the opportunity open and hopefully

she gets fit, is playing again and then it is about showing your performance and fitness. That is what we need and we have a little less time than before the EUROs because we were here in England for a long period of time and we don't have that this time now.

"So we are a little bit concerned but also we won't think too much forward and will see how she progresses."

It's safe to say Wiegman has a lot of thinking to do. Some players will be feeling pretty confident they can pack their sunglasses, but others will be hoping the rest of the season will prove they have what it takes.

#### **April Squad**

**Goalkeepers:** Mary Earps (Manchester United), Ellie Roebuck (Manchester City), Hannah Hampton (Aston Villa)

**Defenders:** Lotte Wubben-Moy (Arsenal), Lucy Bronze (Barcelona), Jess Carter (Chelsea), Niamh Charles (Chelsea), Rachel Daly (Aston Villa), Maya Le Tissier (Manchester United), Leah Williamson (Arsenal), Lucy Parker (West Ham)

**Midfielders:** Laura Coombs (Liverpool), Fran Kirby (Chelsea), Georgia Stanway (Bayern Munich), Ella Toone (Manchester United), Keira Walsh (Barcelona), Jessica Park (Everton)

**Forwards:** Lauren Hemp (Manchester City), Lauren James (Chelsea), Chloe Kelly (Manchester City), Jessica Park (Everton), Katie Robinson (Brighton), Alessia Russo (Manchester United)



# Lionesses: A look back at the 2000s

By **Clare McEwen**

The Lionesses began the new millennium in a strong position. In 1998, Hope Powell was appointed head coach - the first full-time coach for the English women. Hope brought her experience of the international game and a vision. Having earned 66 caps for her country and scored 35 goals during the 1980s and 1990s, Hope knew what needed to change. That experience would prove invaluable as the women's game began to move out of the shadow of the men's game.

During this decade, women's football in England began its slow transition from amateur to semi-professional. In the year 2000, Rachel Yankey - capped 129 times - was the first player in England to turn professional. And more would follow, albeit on an individual basis. But baby steps are still steps!

With the new dawning of a new millennium, a new world was revealing itself on the pitch (as well as off it). A decade where women players began



to become household names.

## **Euro 2001**

Having recently switched to a four-yearly event, the women's major international competitions now paralleled the men's: every two years brought a major tournament.

As it turned out, the 2001 Euros were one to forget for Hope and England. The Lionesses only managed a single point in the group phase: drawing with Russia. They were soundly beaten by both Germany and Sweden, still very much dominant forces in women's football. Having not qualified from the group, they had to watch on as Germany lifted the trophy.

Despite the early exit, women and girls were still being inspired by the sport in England. In 2002 the FA announced football had become the most played sport amongst girls and women. They had initially targeted 2005 as a date to achieve this by. See, we kept telling you we wanted to play!

## **World Cup 2003**

Fortunately, the Lionesses only had to wait a couple of years for the next major tournament opportunity. But this one didn't go to plan either and England failed to qualify for the United States hosted World Cup. They (probably) watched Germany lift the trophy on the TV (like the rest of us).

[Don't worry, this decade is going to improve, I promise.]

## **Euros 2005**

Midway through the 2000s and the collision of Hope Powell, talented footballers, and the start of professionalism was yet to set the world on fire. But in 2005, the Euros came to England. Eight teams took part, and as hosts, England qualified automatically.

On the pitch, the Lionesses still hadn't found their roar. They picked up just three points against Finland: once more failing to get through to the knockout stages.

But we should remember we were still a long way behind teams like Germany and Sweden who invested in the women's game much sooner than us: we were still playing catch-up. Despite this, the game was on the rise in England. The Lionesses' opening game of the tournament at the City of Manchester stadium brought 29,092 people out to watch - a record at the time. The match was shown on BBC Two and nearly three million more watched it on television.

### World Cup 2007

For the first time in 12 years, England qualified for the World Cup - this year held in China. Obviously, they ended up in a group with Germany, but this time it didn't stop them. The Lionesses opened the campaign with a 2-2 draw against Japan: Kelly Smith scoring both English goals. Next up were Germany who, on the back of an 11-0 thumping of Argentina, had seemingly run out of goals: the game finished 0-0. England's third game was against Argentina who were yet to win a point. England won 6-1 with goals from Jill Scott, Fara Williams, Kelly Smith (two), and Vicky Exley, plus an Argentinian own goal.

England played the United States in the quarter finals but were beaten 3-0. Germany

won another World Cup, continuing their dominance.

Kelly Smith scored four goals, though, and was named in the all-star team of the tournament. The Lionesses were beginning to become household names - at least during major tournaments - and more and more girls were being inspired by them.

### Euros 2009

Ending the decade strongly, the Lionesses found their roar in Finland for the 2009 Euros. Losing their opening game against Italy, they stepped it up to beat Russia 3-2 (having been 2-0 down within 22 minutes) before recording a 1-1 draw against Sweden. They came third in their group but went through as one of the best third placed teams.

In the quarters, they knocked out Finland with a 3-2 win: goals supplied by Eniola Aluko (two) and Fara Williams. Next up were The Netherlands. England edged a close game winning 2-1 after extra time, with Kelly Smith scoring the opener and Jill Scott scoring the winner in the 116th minute.

The final was against Germany (who else!) in front of nearly 16,000 people in Helsinki. The Lionesses were 2-0 down early on before Karen Carney pulled one back. At 3-1 down,

Kelly Smith scored but Germany dominated and won 6-2.

Getting to the final proved that England had built the foundations. They may still be behind Germany, but they were making progress. Eniola Aluko and Kelly Smith finished the tournament as joint top scorers on three each, and although finishing runners up was disappointing, it would give something to build on into the next decade.

Meanwhile, the under-19s lifted their Euros trophy in Belarus. The team included future stars Lucy Bronze, Jordan Nobbs, and Toni Duggan.

In May 2009, the FA had awarded central contracts to 27 England players to allow them to train full time, rather than juggle football with a job.

The decade finished strongly: the senior team were runner's up at the Euros, the u19s were champions, big names were emerging, and Hope Powell was building a platform for the future.

Securing contracts for players was a giant leap forward: finally, the FA was taking women's football seriously.

# SCOTTISH STORIES



## Scotland launch anniversary shirt

As part of the association's 150th anniversary celebrations, the Scottish FA have today released a special edition shirt to commemorate this historic landmark. The Scotland National Team has a rich history stretching back 150 years – from taking to the pitch at Hamilton Crescent for the first ever international football match against England, to more recently seeing both Men's and Women's National Teams qualify for major tournaments. The Scotland Women's National Team wore the shirt against Costa Rica at Hampden Park on Tuesday, 11 April. Scotland came out 4-0 winners.

## Glasgow City coach wins award

David Martin of Glasgow City has been named Scottish Women's Football and s1jobs Youth Coach of the Month for March.

Martin received the most nominations from 33 coaches nominated across the country who are inspiring girls in their football and displaying good qualities as a leader and role model.

Davie Martin said: "I'm delighted to be announced the winner. Its nice to have Good feedback for the hard work and dedication."



## Giffnock Soccer Centre under-16 enjoy training masterclass with Scotland Women's National Team

Giffnock SC Under 16s girls enjoyed a money-can't-buy prize thanks to M&S Food and the Scottish FA, with a chance to train with the Scottish Women's National Team at Hampden Park.

On the eve of the team's international friendly against Costa Rica at Hampden Park, Scotland stars including Caroline Weir and Fiona Brown took the girls through their paces at the National Stadium. The team scooped the national competition after being nominated in recognition of recently reaching the final of the Scottish Challenge Cup only three years after being founded. The squad of 25 girls were hosted by comedian and Scotland superfan Ray Bradshaw during the unique trip which featured a Q&A with Scotland legend Jane Ross and a stadium tour before watching the national team train at Lesser Hampden.

Kenny Wilson, Head Coach, Under 16 Girls at Giffnock SC said: "It was an amazing day. The squad has achieved so much in a short period of time and this was the icing on the cake of the season for the girls to train with their heroes. We are Scotland's largest grassroots club and the Womens' section is the fastest-growing section. It's amazing to give them this reward and encourage them onto bigger things next season. Many thanks to M&S Food and the Scottish FA."



# SCOTLAND SQUAD

FIONA BROWN (FC ROSENGÅRD), JENNA CLARK (GLASGOW CITY), EARTHA CUMINGS (LIVERPOOL), ERIN CUTHBERT (CHELSEA), LAUREN DAVIDSON (GLASGOW CITY), NICOLA DOCHERTY (RANGERS), CLAIRE EMSLIE (ANGEL CITY FC), SARAH EWENS (LONDON CITY LIONESSES), JENNA FIFE (RANGERS), LEE GIBSON (GLASGOW CITY), CHRISTY GRIMSHAW (AC MILAN), KIRSTY HANSON (ASTON VILLA (ON LOAN FROM MANCHESTER UNITED)), BROGAN HAY (RANGERS), KATHRYN HILL (RANGERS), SOPHIE HOWARD (LEICESTER CITY), SAMANTHA KERR (RANGERS), RACHEL MCLAUGHLAN (RANGERS), AMY MUIR (GLASGOW CITY), EMMA MUKANDI (READING), CHRISTIE MURRAY (BIRMINGHAM CITY), KIRSTY SMITH (WEST HAM UNITED), MARTHA THOMAS (MANCHESTER UNITED), EMMA WATSON (RANGERS), CAROLINE WEIR REAL (MADRID)

# Grainger names Wales squad for April



© Joerdelf Photography | Da

Gemma Grainger has announced her Cymru squad for the upcoming international challenge matches against Northern Ireland and Portugal.

Grainger has selected a 26-player squad for the second camp of the year as Cymru look to build on their unbeaten 2023 Pinatar Cup campaign in February.

Ffion Morgan and Chloe Williams both return to the squad, while uncapped Coventry United midfielder Ellen Jones (on loan from Leicester City), who was called up for the training camp in June, has been selected.

Ellen Jones could make her international debut after being named in Wales' squad for next month's games against Northern Ireland and Portugal.

The midfielder, 20, was capped by Gemma Grainger when the current Wales manager was England Under-17s boss, but has switched international allegiance.

Grainger said: "It's a real positive to have Ellen coming into the squad and gives us the strength and depth that we need.

"She is a player who is incredibly competitive, incredibly driven to want to be the best she can and that kind of mindset and mentality is something we want to bread in our team."

But Brighton striker Kayleigh Green misses out with injury.

Grainger said: "Kayleigh is a great player for us and she's a miss but what we want to make sure is that she takes care of herself and looks after herself.

"We know the Nations league draw is coming up and we want our players to be ready and fit for selection then.

"So whilst it's disappointing for Kayleigh, it gives us the opportunity to look at something different within the team and gives others the opportunity to potentially step into that role which is a huge positive for the team as well." Grainger's side welcome Northern Ireland on Thursday 6 April, with a 7:15pm kick-off at the Cardiff City Stadium. Tickets are still available to purchase at [faw.cymru/tickets](http://faw.cymru/tickets).

Cymru then travel to Guimaraes to take on Portugal at Estadio D. Afonso Henriques on Tuesday, April 11.

Both matches will be shown live on BBC Wales.



# WALES SQUAD

LAURA O'SULLIVAN (CARDIFF CITY LADIES), OLIVIA CLARK (BRISTOL CITY), SAFIA MIDDLETON-PATEL (MANCHESTER UNITED), RHIANNON ROBERTS (LIVERPOOL), CHARLIE ESTCOURT (BIRMINGHAM CITY), HAYLEY LADD (MANCHESTER UNITED), JOSIE GREEN (LEICESTER CITY), GEMMA EVANS (READING), LILY WOODHAM (READING), ESTHER MORGAN (SUNDERLAND – ON LOAN FROM TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR), SOPHIE INGLE (CHELSEA), ANNA FILBEY (CRYSTAL PALACE), ANGHARAD JAMES (TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR), JESS FISHLOCK (COL REIGN), CERI HOLLAND (LIVERPOOL), MEGAN WYNN (SOUTHAMPTON), HANNAH CAIN (LEICESTER CITY), FFION MORGAN (BRISTOL CITY), ELISE HUGHES (CRYSTAL PALACE), GEORGIA WALTERS (SHEFFIELD UNITED), CARRIE JONES (LEICESTER CITY), ELLA POWELL (BRISTOL CITY), RACHEL ROWE (READING), CHLOE WILLIAMS (BLACKBURN ROVERS - ON LOAN FROM MANCHESTER UNITED), ALICE GRIFFITHS (SOUTHAMPTON), ELLEN JONES (COVENTRY UNITED - ON LOAN FROM LEICESTER CITY).



# WELSH WORD



## Wales U16 Squad named

Cymru's WU16 squad will compete in a UEFA Development Tournament facing Israel, Czech Republic and Iceland. Cymru WU16: Sofia KELLY (FAW Girls Academy South), Cadi DORAN (Liverpool), Leila YAU (FAW Girls Academy South), Somoraa FLETCHER (FAW Girls Academy South), Cadi RODGERS (FAW Girls Academy North), Caitlin SWEENEY (FAW Girls Academy South), Seren MABE (FAW Girls Academy South), Shurima VINE (FAW Girls Academy South), Tazmin WHITE (FAW Girls Academy South), Annie DAVIES (FAW Girls Academy North), Darcie TROW (FAW Girls Academy South), Nia LEWIS (FAW Girls Academy South), Maia OWEN (FAW Girls Academy South), Emily COLE (Stoke City), Lexi JONES (Stoke City), Poppy HOLT (FAW Girls Academy North), Evie SADLER (FAW Girls Academy North), Ellie EVANS (FAW Girls Academy South), Charlotte SAILSBUURY-WILLIAMS (Wolverhampton Wanderers), Lili ANGOVE (FAW Girls Academy South)

## FAW Fair Play Week

The Nationwide Building Society FAW Fair Play Week takes place from 7th to 16th April across all FAW National Leagues. The Fair Play Week is an initiative run by the FAW to promote the message of Fair Play throughout Welsh football. The Fair Play initiative is in partnership with the Nationwide Building Society, who are making a stand for a better society. The aim is to reinforce the importance of mutual respect on and off the pitch, encouraging a reduction in on-field misconduct and promoting the FAW Fair Play Code.



**FAW**  
**FAIRPLAY**



## Cymru secure Uefa WU19 Euro League A

Cymru sealed promotion to League A of next season's UEFA WU19 European Qualifying Round with victories against Kazakhstan and Estonia in Denbigh. The campaign started with a 5-2 win against Kazakhstan last Tuesday (4 April), with a brace each for Tianna Teisar and Manon Pearce and a goal for Lauren Purchase. Nicola Anderson's side clinched promotion with an impressive 4-0 win over Estonia on Monday afternoon (10 April), finishing top of League B Group 6 in the process.

## Aber into Challenge Cup final

Aberystwyth Town have made it through to the in the final of the Central Wales FA Ladies' Challenge Cup beating Aberystwyth University 11-1.

The first team got things started, firing in the goals at the university sports ground. Bethan Roberts was instrumental, running the game from the middle and also scoring a hat-trick, with Emily Thomas also grabbing three. Shauna Chambers and Amy Jenkins both grabbed a brace whilst Rebecca Mathias was also on the scoresheet with a fine header from a corner.

The two blots on the day were the loss of the clean sheet plus a missed penalty from Tania Wylde - but all in all it was a resounding victory for Gavin Allen's side.

The development team fought hard in an effort to make it an all-Aber Town cup final, but went in one down just before the end of the first half.

The first team will now face Llanfair United in the final, with further arrangements to be confirmed.



Steve Williams



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# Genaro Adran Premier Champions Announced

In what's so far been a near faultless season, Cardiff City were today crowned Genaro Premier Champions. The trophy celebration will be at their last home game of the season against Swansea.

Elsewhere it was a record-breaking day, with Wrexham beating Cardiff's record for the highest ever crowd at a domestic league game (men or women), with 9,511 at the Racecourse.

For those not at Wrexham there was plenty of action across Wales. At Leckwith, Cardiff hosted TNS knowing a win would take them over the line; the opening goal was one worthy of taking the title, Ffion Price (31') hitting from just outside the box to drop perfectly into the top corner. Beth Lewis wasn't going to let Cardiff get their hopes up too soon, as she hit back straight away for the visitors (32') to see the scores level at half time. The Bluebirds came back out with renewed determination and it paid off with captain Siobhan Walsh heading home a second (55'), before stepping up to take the penalty after Lily Billingham was brought down in the box (84'P). Walsh's two goals went without reply and secured the vital three points to give Cardiff City the league for the first time in 10 years. Final score 3-1.

In Llandarcy Swansea were determined not to make life easy

for Cardiff, knowing that anything less than a win for them would likely hand their crown their South coast rivals. Cardiff Met meanwhile we hoping to bounce back from last weeks' disappointment and find the form that had seen them win the Genaro Adran Trophy title two weeks ago. Chloe Chivers was the first name on the scoresheet, combining with Ellie Lake (32') to put the hosts ahead. It looked like this could be the only goal of the game, but Nia Rees stepped up eight minutes from time to double the Swans lead (82'). There was still more drama to come as Rees was then taken down in the box, with Meg Saunders converting the subsequent penalty for her first goal in Swansea colours (89'P). Swansea took all three points and secured 2nd spot as some consolation for losing the trophy. Final score 3-0.

In the Plate conference the race for the title is still on, with both Ponty and Aberystwyth picking up three points.

Pontypridd were on the road to Penypound to face Abergavenny, their last visit had seen the hosts pick up their first win of the season. Ponty hit first with Holly Borad heading home Efa Preece-Jones' cross (19') before Carys Bufton (31') fired across the box, hitting the

post before going in to double the lead. In the second half it was once again the visitors that hit first, Liv Francis adding a third (59') before Lauren Boyd pulled one back for the hosts (67'). Sub Lucy Jones took just eight minutes from coming on to restore Ponty's four goal advantage (76') with Evie Hughes putting a cherry on the cake (83') to finish the game 1-5.

Aberystwyth were also on the road, heading to Jenner Park to face Barry, who after a challenging run of games had a bounce of sorts with a 0-0 against Ponty last weekend.

With yet another penalty awarded today, Tania Wylde put the Seasiders ahead (13'). Barry struggled to find a reply and Aberystwyth struck again through Kelly Thomas early in the second half (48'). Neither side could find the net again, allowing Aberystwyth to keep their hopes of the Plate title alive. Final score 0-2.

There's still two rounds to go and still plenty of action to come in the Genaro Adran Premier and of course some celebrations to come!

## Results

Swansea City 3-0 Cardiff Met  
Cardiff City 3-1 New Saints  
Barry Town 0-2 Aberystwyth Town  
Abergavenny 1-5 Pontypridd United

## Grey joins Grainger's coaching staff



Gemma Grainger has appointed Jon Grey to her coaching staff ahead of matches against Northern Ireland and Portugal.

Grey joins the FAW after working at Swansea City, most recently as the U21 Head Coach and Academy Manager. Grey also represented Cymru as a player in the age group systems and has also been involved with the FAW in a part-time coaching capacity in recent years.

The role as Assistant Coach for the

senior women's team has been confirmed on a full-time basis after Grey was part of Gemma Grainger's coaching staff for last month's Pinatar Cup.

Speaking about the appointment, Grey said "I'm delighted and excited to be joining the FAW at such a positive time for Welsh football.

"I spoke with Gemma about how we can work together, and within five minutes I knew I wanted to get involved.

"The matches next week will be great preparations for

the Nations League, we know we have some big games coming up once the draw is made, and we have to be ready for them."

Gemma Grainger also expressed her delight at the appointment "I wanted a Welsh coach with a Pro Licence, and Jon was great in the environment when he was with us last month.

"It's the first time we have a full-time assistant coach just for the senior team, Jon's a great fit for the role and I can't wait to work with him in the upcoming matches."

— THE WOMEN'S FOOTBALL MAGAZINE —

AWARDS

Coming Soon

# NORTHERN IRELAND NATTER



## Grassroots Awards launched

McDonald's and the Irish Football Association have launched the 2023 Grassroots Football Awards. The annual McDonald's Irish FA Grassroots Football Awards recognise the incredible work and commitment of football clubs and volunteers who give up their time and make a long-lasting impact on young people and communities across Northern Ireland.

## NI stars pass on their skills

Budding Abbey Primary School footballers were put through their paces today by two Northern Ireland international players in an action-packed training masterclass as part of M&S Food's Eat Well, Play Well partnership with the Irish FA. Northern Ireland senior women's team players Marissa Callaghan and Demi Vance passed on their footballing knowledge and skills to the Co Down school's football team after they won a coaching session with their Northern Ireland heroes.

## New NI kit launched

A new away kit for Northern Ireland's women's international teams inspired by the Giant's Causeway was unveiled today by adidas. The kit will be worn for the first time by the senior women's team during next week's friendly against Wales in Cardiff. Adidas explained the away kit has been inspired by the rock formations along Northern Ireland's North Coast and by the Giant's Causeway in particular. The shirt is the third in a series based on Northern Ireland's land and sea. The home shirt, worn by both men's and women's teams, is based on the country's landscape, in particular its green fields, while the men's away shirt was inspired by the Harland and Wolff cranes in Belfast. The new away kit will only be available in a women's cut. Sold through JD, the Irish Football Association's retail partner, it can be pre-ordered at <https://www.northernirelandfootballshop.co.uk/> with an expected release date of 6 April.

## Danske Bank Sponsorship

The NI Football League can confirm that after eleven hugely successful years, the long-term sponsorship with Danske Bank will come to an end. First established in 2012, the partnership has been one of the consistent features of the exponential growth of the NI Football League over the last decade. Over the eleven seasons of the Danske Bank Premiership, average match attendances have risen over 82% with 300,000+ fans enjoying top level football across the country each season.



## NIFL announce partnership

The Northern Ireland Football League (NIFL) are pleased to announce Sports Direct as the new title sponsor of both the Premiership and Women's Premiership. The exciting new three-year partnership marks a new dawn for NIFL as the biggest commercial deal in the history of the league. Gerard Lawlor, NIFL said, "This is a huge step forward for the league."



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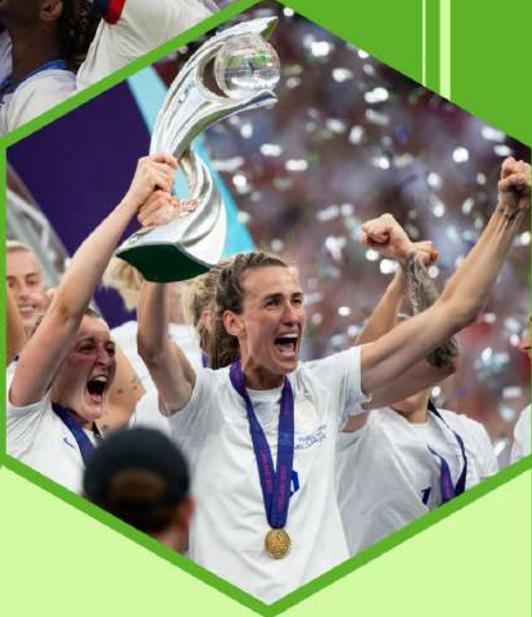


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# INTERNATIONAL TOURNAMENTS

# MATCH Hospitality launches Official Hospitality sales for FIFA Women's World Cup



Richard Callis / Fotoarena

The FIFA Women's World Cup 2023 will take place between 20 July to 20 August 2023, with 32 nations competing for the ultimate prize in women's football.

The tournament is the first to be jointly hosted by two nations, Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand, with matches taking place in ten stadiums across nine cities in these modern, friendly and beautiful countries.

The Official Hospitality Programme includes three distinct products - MATCH Private Suite, MATCH Club, and MATCH Place - and multiple series that enable you to follow your favourite team, stake out your "home ground" stadium, or guarantee that you can witness the exciting culmination of the tournament.

MATCH Private Suite offers an exceptional hospitality experience

for guests to enjoy the on-pitch action from the vantage of the best private hospitality offering, complete with immediate and direct access to your stadium seats, a private dining experience, premium drinks, and extended service. It is also an ideal product for entertaining guests in your own luxurious space.

MATCH Club is a great choice for friends and families, or fans looking for a sociable lounge environment from which to celebrate the beautiful game. It includes your Category 1 ticket, deli-style menu, drinks, and service before, during half-time and after matches.

MATCH Place is a ticket-inclusive hospitality product with in-seat food and beverage service, with the added convenience of priority access to the stadium.

Jaime Byrom, Executive Chairman of MATCH Hospitality, said: "We are delighted to announce the launch of sales for our exclusive Official Hospitality Programme. Women's football is finally enjoying the global prominence it deserves, and the FIFA Women's World Cup 2023 will be a showcase of talent on the pitch, and stylish service in the stadiums. Our hospitality programme offers the opportunity to rethink your expectations and experiences - above and beyond."

MATCH Hospitality is the only company authorised by FIFA to offer ticket-inclusive hospitality packages for every match of the FIFA Women's World Cup 2023. Data from recently opened ticket sales windows saw fans from close to 100 countries booking their seats, a testament to the soaring popularity of the game and the tournament this summer.

# Away Days at the Women's World Cup

By Jamie Davies

Adidas have released this summer's Fifa Women's World Cup away kits.

We have started counting down the days until this summer's Women's World Cup in Australia and New Zealand.

The prospect of warmer weather, squad announcements, last friendlies and getting together with your friends are just part of the many things to get excited about ahead of any World Cup.

One of the things the fans always look forward to is the launch of the new kit designs with many debating over who has the best squad.

With 32 teams in this year's Women's World Cup for the



first time, there are even more exciting shirts to come from. Whether you are looking forward to seeing what England brings out following their European Championships success, cannot wait to get your hands on Ireland's historic shirt or you fancy a shirt from another team from across the world, there will be too many to chose from!

Adidas have become the first to reveal to the world what their away kits for their supplied teams are going to look like when the Women's World Cup kicks off on July 20 in Australia and New Zealand.

Earlier this year, the German manufacturer brought out the official match ball for the tournament called Oceanz. The Adidas 2023 Women's World Cup football combines a white

base with black and blue applications and striking yellow detailing. The graphics are inspired by the spectacular coastlines, lakes and waterways of Australia and New Zealand.

There are some patterns inspired by traditional designs of aborigines, and of course the official Adidas and 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup logos.

The Australian patterns have been created by renowned local artist, Chern'ee Sutton, while the markings representing New Zealand were designed by Kiwi artist, Fiona Collis.

After a bit of time getting used to the ball design it is now time to see which certain teams are going to look like in their away colours.

It is fair to say that away shirts for any club or country are usually more exciting than the home kit due to the freedom of creativity. Home colours stay the same but the visiting uniform could be anything!

The away shirts for Germany, Argentina, Japan, Italy, Sweden, Jamaica, Spain and Colombia have been launched by Adidas with similar templates for each one.

These scintillating kit designs are all inspired by nature, celebrating the iconic scenery and diverse natural landscapes of each country - including the vast green woodlands of Germany, the sprawling glacial rivers of Sweden and the ever-changing colours of the Caño Cristales River in Colombia.

Not only do the shirts look good but they also are good for the environment as well. Both authentic and replica versions of the adidas kits are made from Parley Ocean Plastic, re-imagined plastic waste, intercepted on remote islands, beaches, coastal communities and shorelines, preventing it from polluting our ocean. The other 50% of the yarn is recycled polyester.

Adidas' ambition behind the

designs was to create a connection between players and fans by encouraging a shared appreciation of the wonders of the natural environment in their country, as explained by Sam Handy, Vice President Product and Design, adidas Football: "As with every major competition, we know the designs will become etched into football's history books.

"With the tournament being held in Australia and New Zealand - two countries with iconic landscapes - we wanted to create a common theme throughout our kits, in celebration of the wonders of the natural environments that can be found around the world."

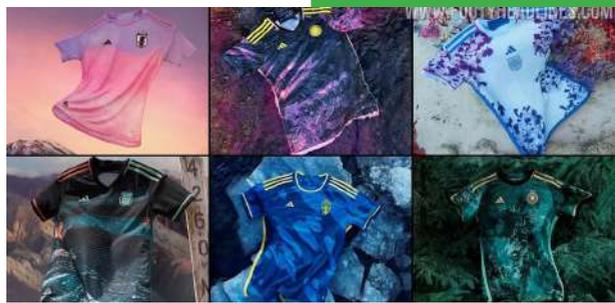
As many as 10 of the 32 teams competing at the tournament in Australia and New Zealand will be wearing adidas kits. New jerseys for Costa Rica, Italy and Jamaica have already been unveiled, with Philippines still to come as they compete on the global stage for the first time.

All federation kits are available to purchase from March 23 via [adidas.com](http://adidas.com) and in adidas retail stores, with Authentic versions retailing at €140 and Replica versions retailing at €90.

England's kits are designed by Nike hence why their shirts are not included but we are still waiting to see if the Lionesses will wear something different to the ones worn at last summer's Women's Euros. Sarina Wiegman's side are still wearing those shirts and normally when it comes to major tournaments, every nation promote a new teamwear for obvious marketing purposes.

So still lots to be excited about in build-up to this summer's main event as we may just have some new stuff coming England's way and of course other countries contracted to the likes of Nike and Puma.

Out of all the Adidas away shirts, which one is your favourite design and which are you looking forward to the most?



# World Cup bids flying in

By Helen Rowe-Willcocks



Belgium, Netherlands and Germany have made a bid for the 2027 Fifa Women's World Cup.

Fifa opened the bidding process in March and the three countries wasted no time in launching their joint bid.

Taking to Twitter 'BNG2027' wrote: "We're ready for it Fifa Women's World Cup 2027. So Fifa, you've got mail!"

The bid's campaign slogan reads 'Breaking New Grounds', the three capitals referring to the three bidding nations.

The countries first expressed their ambition to jointly host the tournament in 2020. They are expected to be up against Brazil as well as South Africa for the right to host.

"We want to seize the momentum with our bid and together give women's football a new boost," said the KBVB manager of women's football Katrien Jans.

"Great sports moments inspire. This way we want to put women's football on the map. We want to create the best sporting conditions for our players, create a unique atmosphere for the fans and pay great attention to a sustainable organisation."

Germany hosted the Women's World Cup in 2011 while the Netherlands organised Euro 2017. Belgium has never staged a major women's tournament and some of its infrastructure requires an overhaul. It would be the first time that the tournament would be staged by a triumvirate of countries.

The KNVB's Gijs de Jong added: "The popularity of women's football in the Netherlands has skyrocketed after the European Championship in 2017. Since then, the Orange Women have become an integral part of Dutch football."

Expression of interest deadline has been set for April 23.

Fifa said it will set up a Bid Evaluation Task Force once the bidding nations are known. Site visits are programmed to start in February 2024 with the aim to take the bids to the FIFA Council who will then approve three bids to go before a vote at the FIFA Congress.

Bid documents have to be submitted by December this year.

Brazil's Sports Ministry confirmed in March that they will bid to host 2027.

FIFA Secretary General Fatma Samoura said: "The FIFA Women's World Cup 2027 will build on the legacy of the record-breaking edition that Australia and New Zealand are due to organise in a few months. In line with FIFA's commitment to women's football, this bidding process sets new standards and puts us on track to host an outstanding event in 2027 on and off the pitch."

The 2027 Women's World Cup hosts will be announced on May 17, 2024.

## LOOKING AT THE BIGGEST DISCUSSIONS IN THE GAME

### Should games be played at the 'big' stadiums?

Old Trafford and Goodison Park were just two of the big stadiums used in women's football weekend, but do fans like going to the big grounds?

#### YES

Matt Roberts: As much as i love it sometimes the atmosphere isnt improved. One reason to love it, it feels like the clubs are unifying and not separating their teams

Craig Hadley: There are better facilities for the players.

James Keep: I am a big fan of women's teams playing in their clubs' actual stadiums. Media calling them 'men's stadiums' isn't super helpful though.

Kieth Boanas: Simple answer is why not? but other answers are facilities and a mark of respect, togetherness and equality.

Taylor Erika RS: Its nice as a celebration of our game or for big and important fixtures. I still love watching Arsenal at Borehamwood though. Ideally we would have our own stadium.

Anonymous: I think it's good for big games like derbies or for title deciding games because there is normally more hype around it and it builds up the excitement. It also builds up the women's game becuae more people can go to the game becuae there are more seats available.

Judie Tingle: Why should women get second best?

#### NO

Grandmother Flash: I much prefer fuller smaller stadiums but I understand that the clubs main stadium needs to be used occasionally to increase visibility & attendance.

Simon Kingman: I understand that things have to change and the game is progressing but I love Kingsmeadow it's a special place where we're making friends. Playing in a half full/empty Stamford bridge just feels wrong.

Ian Chiverton: Not really from a selfish point of view. I actually like the smaller grounds where you are closer to the players and the pitch. But understand its probably got to go the stadium route in order to grow. When it's 500 in a 30k stadium though, it's not a great atmosphere.

Anonymous: I don't think you get the same atmosphere at the big grounds. I would rather fill our normal stadium then have the players play in front of a half empty big one. In the smaller stadiums fans can come together and chant -often at big stadiums the fans don't know the songs so it's a lot quieter.

#### Social Media Poll Results:

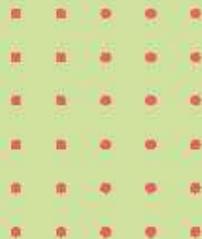
Yes: 86.5%

No: 13.5%



**AROUND**  
**THE WORLD**

# News from Around the World



## Shock allegations in Sierra Leone

Things are not as they should be for the women's footballers in Sierra Leone. Claims of sexual harrasment and poor facilities have led to people questioning Isha Johansen's time as president of the Football Association. According to Bilkisu Kandeh-Turay they did not get kit, food, medical facilites or transport as well as facing constant messages.



## Stars criticise Fifa 23 depictions

When the Women's Champions League and NWSL were added to FIFA 23 people were excited - until they saw the results. Houston Dash star Caprice Dydasco took to Twitter to share her shock saying "I'm grateful EA Sports has finally including the NWSL but this does not represent me." "Please tell me I did not do an entire body scan for that," tweeted Sydney Leroux, an Olympian gold medalist who currently plays for Angel City FC. "You are going to scare my children."

## Playstation becomes Uefa partner

Playstation has become an official partner of Uefa Women's Football running until 2025. PlayStation will sponsor the UEFA Women's Champions League, UEFA Women's EURO 2025, the UEFA European Women's U19 and U17 Championships, Guy-Laurent Epstein, UEFA marketing director said: " This is a significant moment for the sport and for UEFA, as we continue to work towards developing and growing women's football."



# Back with a bang



Georgia Soares/SPP

The National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) is back and back with a bang.

Over 90,000 people attended a National Women's Soccer League game in the opening weekend shattering the opening weekend record.

Across six games, the league averaged 15,002 fans on Saturday and Sunday, easily surpassing the previous mark, set last year, of 10,150.

That average attendance number used to hover in the mid-four digits. It was 3,321 in the inaugural season, 2013, and up to 7,880 in 2016. COVID-19 essentially wiped out 2020 and heavily impacted 2021.

Bigger stadiums and new teams has seen the NWSL grow over the last year. Angel City regularly filled out the (now named) BMO Stadium and in 2022 San Diego Wave opened the 35,000-seat stadium they are sharing

with San Diego State football.

This year Washington Spirit have moved in with DC United in the capital - a change from being in the suburbs. The move was created by new major shareholder Michele Kang who was heavily invested in the decision.

Meanwhile, Kansas City is constructing the country's first women's-soccer-specific stadium. Clubs are building out their marketing staffs, constructing foundations that will lead to more ticket sales and revenue.

Off the pitch clubs are already breaking records and if last season is anything to go by, we can expect records to be broken on the pitch as well.

So with that in mind we will take you through a quick run down of the dozen teams vying for glory in this seasons' Championship (last season regular finish in brackets).

## ANGEL CITY (8)

It's all eyes on the returning Christen Press over in Los Angeles. The forward is returning after three surgeries in just eight months and fans are excited to see her back on the pitch. There has also been a lot of talk about Alyssa Thompson, a youngster who joined in the draft, high things are expected of her - and she opened her goalscoring account in the opening game against Portland. Head Coach Freya Coombes has handed out a few contracts to keep the backbone intact, as they look to progress again this time.

## CHICAGO RED STARS (6)

Chris Petrucelli will look to better last season's successes in Chicago and has brought in both a Brazilian international - midfielder Julia Bianchi - and a two-time NWSL champion in Cari Roccaro. They've got strength-in-depth as well, with plenty at the back, and up top, to make a real go of it. Don't bet against them. Since the NWSL was launched

2013, the Red Stars have never finished lower than sixth. Their best result coming in 2019 when they were runners-up.

#### **HOUSTON DASH (4)**

Last season was a successful one for the Dash and new Head Coach Sam Laity with them finishing fourth in the regular season. After going out in the first round of the play-offs they will be looking to improve once again. Forward Diana Ordoñez has joined them from North Carolina Courage where she made 19 appearances. Expectations are high as the Dash look to create problems - England's Ebony Salmon is always keen to game her name on the scoresheet.

#### **KANSAS CITY CURRENT (5)**

Kansas City are not coming into the season quietly. A number of big name signings for Matt Potter's side mean fans are expecting a title charge. Brazilian international and legend Debinha and former Bundesliga champion Hanna Glas have joined the squad to add some depth and experience they were lacking last season.

#### **NY/NJ GOTHAM (12)**

After finishing bottom last season, the NYC franchise have brought in experience to help push their squad forward. USWNT defender Kelley O'Hara has

joined the side and became the NWSL's first free transfer. The league established free agency with its new collective bargaining agreement, ratified in February. Despite a rocky start, which included a disagreement between the NWSL and its players association about exactly which players were eligible, the market heated up ahead of the season opener. Sinead Farrelly has come out of retirement to join the NYC franchise as well. The 33-year-old has not played in the NWSL for almost eight years and it was Farrelly's allegations against former Portland Thorns coach Paul Riley which sparked investigations that found widespread sexual abuse and misconduct in the NWSL.

#### **NORTH CAROLINA COURAGE (7)**

It's been a busy off-season in North Carolina but Head Coach Sean Nahas has a packed, exciting, and young squad whom are very eager to impress this season. It is expected to be a 're-building' year for Courage after a mass exodus of players last season - including Sam Mewis and Lynn Williams - left them with a lack of players. Of the Courage's 11 players who played in 19 or more games in last season's 24-game season, six are gone. The two players responsible for more than half of the Courage's goals (Debinha

and Ordoñez) are also gone. Courage are very much starting again following the chaos surrounding Paul Riley and his sacking but they have a number of talented players. In addition to the new arrivals, Brazilian forward Kerolin is a special, audacious player, while midfielders Brianna Pinto and Denise O'Sullivan have been consistent and reliable. Last season Courage missed play-offs for the first time since 2015 (going back to when the team was the Western New York Flash) and there's a sense this team is no longer desperately trying to keep what worked in the past..

#### **OL REIGN (1)**

The majority of the side who finished first in regular season last season, have signed on again this time around for Laura Harvey. Having reached the playoffs six times in nine NWSL seasons, the Reign even made it all the way to the final in their first two appearances in the postseason, yet the championship has remained elusive. Claiming their third Shield last season, the Reign fell at the penultimate hurdle, failing to progress past the semi-finals. Reign have also made a handful of big acquisitions, strengthening an already strong outfit, including the Brazilian midfielder, Luany, signed from

Gremio. You'd be hard-pushed to see past them this time around. Genuine contenders.

### **ORLANDO PRIDE (10)**

Pride finished in the lower end of the league last time around and made getting another goal-scorer a top priority. Brazilian Adriana has joined them from Corinthians and Seb Hines has been made permanent head coach. Orlando have consistently struggled to put out a cohesive balanced team despite the talent they've had over the years. Yet there is a good feeling around Hines, with the team having put a lot of faith in the incoming draft class -- not least with third overall draft pick, Emily Madril, and second round goal-getter Messiah Bright.

### **PORTLAND THORNS (2)**

Perennial powerhouses, the Thorns will of course be going all-out for more silverware this time around with championship glory their aim. The Thorns

won the NWSL Championship last season with a 2-0 win over the Kansas City Current, and the players returning played more than 90% of last season's minutes. Mike Norris, who took over from resigning Rhian Wilkinson, hasn't made any major moves in new signings, but that's no bad thing, this side will still be thereabouts at the seasons end.

### **RACING LOUISVILLE (9)**

In their third season, Racing Louisville are hoping to push further up the league. Kim Björkegren has brought in a number of internationals including Brazilian Ary Borges. According to their roster they have players from six continents with seven potential Women's World Cup players. Their main aim will be to make sure goalkeeper Katie Lund doesn't need to make 112 saves, a league record, again in 2023 like she did in 2022.

### **SAN DIEGO WAVE (3)**

The Wave set people's expecta-

tions high in their first season and Casey Stoney's side have once again strengthened their squad. Melanie Barcenas, 15, became the youngest-ever player to sign in NWSL and joins the likes of Kailen Sheridan, Naomi Girma, Rachel Hill, Alex Morgan et al, not forgetting the youngest ever draftee addition in Melanie Barcenas. A favourite for the title?

### **WASHINGTON SPIRIT (11)**

Mark Parsons is back at Washington Spirit after a spell between 2013-2015 saw him struggle to cope with an owner who didn't know how to run the club. The previous coach, Kris Ward, was fired late last season and barred from coaching in the NWSL indefinitely for what the league called "overly aggressive behaviour and harassment." The Spirit roster remains a young team but there are several seasoned veterans to help push things forward.



Georgia Soares/SPP

# Bayern beat Wolfsburg in title race

By Peter Mann



Bayern Munich and VfL Wolfsburg continue to battle it out to lift the Frauen Bundesliga at the end of the season.

The two sides met on March 25 for the second time this season with Bayern being the side to take away all three points. A late penalty from England Lioness Georgia Stanway in the second half was enough to secure them the three points.

Bayern have only lost one game this season but both of Wolfsburg's defeats have come in the last month. On March 4 they found themselves on the wrong end of a 2-1 defeat. Despite Jule Brand opening the scoring after just one minute, an Felicitas Rauch own goal and a goal from Nicole Billa in the second half were enough to see them fall to their first defeat of the season.

League leaders Bayern were unbeaten in the league in March beating Werder Bremen, Duisburg and Köln in convincing victories. Goalscorers including Sydney Lohmann, Lina Magull, Stanway and Lea Schuller.

Meanwhile, at the other end of the

table Turbine Potsdam continue to struggle. Winners of a dozen championships, three DFB Pokal, and two-time Champions League winners, in 2005 and 2010, it is hard to see such a big name in the Frauen Bundesliga fall.

They are looking more and more likely of enduring the fate of seeing both their sides, relegated, this season; the first team are currently ten adrift at the bottom, and without a win heading into late March, whilst Potsdam II, although won once, are eight adrift in the 2.Frauen Bundesliga.

Hoffenheim meanwhile followed up their win over the Wolfsburg, with defeats of Meppen (4-0), and Freiburg (1-0), Paulina Krumbiegel with a brace in the first of those successes.

Leverkusen's March was mixed, although a 2-1 win away to fourth bottom Meppen kept their noses ahead of the tight, bottom half. The visitors would finish the match with ten, but had enough

in the bank to take all the points thanks to goals from Kristan Kogel and Selina Ostermeier.

Duisburg needed to defeat visitors Potsdam at the start of the month, knowing that powerhouses Bayern, and Bremen, were next up, they won that relegation clash 3-0, all three goals coming from Sarah Freutel, inside thirty-five minutes. Their final match of the month against Eintracht Frankfurt was called off due to bad weather conditions.

None of the bottom four sides managed to pick up a win in March but second-bottom Köln grabbed a couple of points with goalless draws against Leverkusen and Potsdam. Those two results coming either side of a 5-0 thrashing by league leaders Bayern Munich.

With just a point separating the top two and at least five games to go, it remains all to play for in Germany. Fans of the Lionesses will be hoping Georgia Stanway can bring home the trophy with Bayern Munich.

# News from Around the World

## Quantas announce deal extension

Football Australia and Qantas have inked a three-year partnership extension ahead of the landmark 2023 Fifa Women's World Cup on home soil. Australian soccer's governing body first partnered with Qantas in 2004, with the agreement later expanded to also include the Matildas. Renewal keeps Australia's flag carrier as the official airline.



## Iran team members snub training camp

Fourteen players in the Iranian women's national football team refused to participate in the second round of their training camp, claiming that the sports authorities were "indifferent to their concerns". Media reports cited "financial problems and "lack of facilities" as the reasons for the boycott. According to IranWire sources, football federation Vice President Maryam Monazami insulted members of Iran's team on March 15.

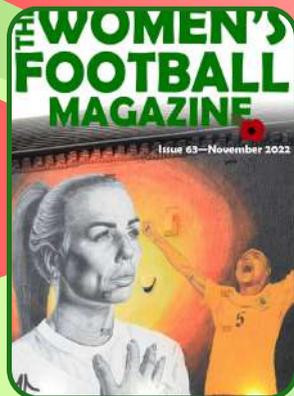
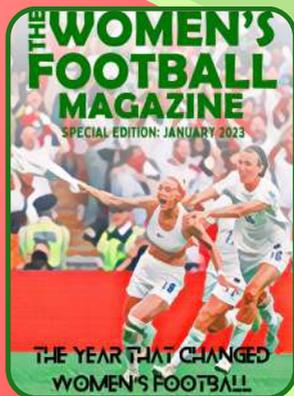


## Diacre sacked as France head coach

Corinne Diacre has been sacked from her role as head coach of the France Women's national team, the French Football Federation has confirmed. The 48-year-old had been in charge since 2017, having earned over 120 caps as a player between 1993 and 2005. Diacre said: "I have been the subject of a smear campaign that is astonishing in its violence and dishonesty. My detractors have not hesitated to attack my personal integrity."



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SARINA WIEGMAN