

TWFFM

—THE WOMEN'S FOOTBALL MAGAZINE—

TWFFM

ISSUE D69 - MAY 2023



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Company number: 12839197



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.



Editor's Note

Welcome to our new issue - I hope you enjoy it!

As we get to the business end of the season, it is fabulous to see how much is still to play for. It's a sign of the growth of the game that the title in the WSL is going to the final games, the relegation battle continues and in League One Bristol City and London City Lionesses spent a lot of the season overlapping. In the 10 years I have been covering the game, I don't remember getting to May and not knowing who was going to be champion. At the other side of the scale though is the ever increasing injuries. It has been devastating seeing so many long-term injuries this season across all the leagues. The calendar is so busy at the moment and it's hard to see when it is going to slow down for players. A lot needs to be done to protect not just the physical health but also the mental health of the players. Anyway, this weekend is FA Cup final weekend and it is always one of my favourite days of the year. Whether you are going to Wembley or watching it on TV, I hope you enjoy it. And maybe see some of you there!

We still have a few of our April Print editions so if you haven't got one make sure you grab one before they sell out. Also if you are a full subscriber and have not given us your address make sure you let us know so we can send yours. As always thank you for subscribing, it means the world to all of us who work hard on the magazine each month.

Helen Rowe-Willcocks
Editor-in-chief

PARTY LIKE IT'S 1895!



Helen M Jerome experiences the earliest history of women's club football, as it springs back to life in a corner of North London.

Maybe the best way to celebrate Women's Football Weekend this year was to witness the recreation of the first-ever official women's football club game from 1895. Back then, over 10,000 spectators flocked to Crouch End to see North London defeat their southern foes 7-1. This time an equally enthusiastic, if slightly smaller number of fans gathered in the shadow of Alexandra Palace on a wet and windy Sunday, the pitch appropriately muddy as everyone mucked in. The preparation was meticulous, with 44 brand new period costumes beautifully sewn and laid out across four changing rooms, with great expectations for two re-enacted, historical matches and one modern game.

The entire afternoon was the joint brainchild of local resident and fan, Jacquie Head, along with Alexandra Park Women's football club captain, Kate Gerrand, who started with relatively modest plans. These soon escalated to an extraordinary celebration of the women's game, kicking off with Gerrand's team APWFC playing in the blue of South London, and local rivals Rose FC sporting the red of the

North, some with tiny hats to keep their hair modest. The referee threw himself into his part too, elegantly attired in something vaguely Victorian, akin to David Copperfield meets Peaky Blinders.

Like many of the lost generations, Jacquie Head had her interest in football rekindled after the triumph of the Lionesses in the Euros in the glorious summer of 2022. Messages started pinging round about another local resident, Nettie Honeyball, and the first women's club game she'd organised nearby, way back at the end of the 19th Century. Head knew nothing about it and got fired up. She's still bruised by the memory of her teacher telling her that: "girls don't play football". Now she was spurred into action.

"I didn't know about the Dick Kerr Ladies either, I didn't know how big women's football was, attracting crowds of 53,000. And when the ban came in, well, that explains why I never played."

Head found herself listening to radio phone-ins with a lot of other women who'd also wanted to play football. So she thought: "Come on, let's do this!"

Kate Gerrand has been helping plan this shindig for almost eight months, enthused by the knowledge that the first ever women's football club game

happened round the corner. "It's the history of women's football right where we are today."

Lucky enough to grow up in Australia where football is much more of a women's sport, Gerrand was encouraged and helped to play football as a kid, and her passion for the game continues to this day. She's amazed at how similar the rules are, and the environment and community and feeling of the team is the same, and she can almost feel an echo of Honeyball through the ages - even though Nettie actually captained the North.

"I was surprised at how at ease and in character we felt," says Gerrand, of playing in bloomers, shirts, hats, socks, cardboard "shin guards", and neckties - all made especially for this event by Head's eager band of sisters after intensive research.

"I was grateful not to be in a skirt," Gerrand adds, "but it certainly wasn't as easy as we're used to. Several subbuttons were lost in the game!"

She also remarked on playing with an old-style leather ball: "it was a surprise the first time we kicked it in the game, as it had barely any bounce... definitely tried to avoid headers."

The second historical match was billed as the Dick Kerr Game, pitching local side East Finchley against the Crouch End Crew, a group of women of all ages and abilities, some from walking football, some from five aside, and mostly from the generation who were excluded from playing football.

“We really want to represent women’s football having a resurgence not just in the youth and people in their 20s and 30s, but also in people realising there was no good reason they were excluded when they were kids. And they want to get back into it.”

East Finchley played in the Dick Kerr Ladies gleaming white away kits, and Crouch End Crew in the striped home strip, with both sides wearing black and white striped beanie-style hats.

Anyone sheltering from the weather in the clubhouse could take in the fine

exhibition of photos, features and watercolours telling the story of the matches, teams and players. None was more illustrious than star striker Lily Parr, who’d played up front for Dick Kerr Ladies as they travelled the world showing off their skills, like an Edwardian Harlem Globetrotters. And I was soon chatting to another local resident, Carolyn Baker, who turned out to be a relative of Lily Parr herself. Baker’s 92-year-old mum, June Patten was first cousins with the modest Parr, and always looked up to her.

and players. None was more illustrious than star striker Lily Parr, who’d played up front for Dick Kerr Ladies as they travelled the world showing off their skills, like an Edwardian Harlem Globetrotters. And I was soon chatting to another local resident, Carolyn Baker, who turned out to be a relative of Lily

Parr herself. Baker’s 92-year-old mum, June Patten was first cousins with the modest Parr, and always looked up to her.

“My mum once said: you know

my cousin Lily scored over a thousand goals.

And I didn’t actually believe her,” says Baker. “People weren’t talking about women’s football, so I was like, yeah really.”

Then she saw a TV documentary featuring Parr, and the penny dropped.

“My mum also said that Lily was told by a man: you’re only any good because you’re playing in a women’s team; I bet you couldn’t score a



goal against me. So she said: get in goal. And she kicked the ball at him and actually broke his arm!"

Back on the pitch, after the two historic games, we witnessed 20 minutes of modern league football in current kits, with Rose FC versus APWFC, to show off women's amateur football in 2023.

So across the afternoon there were women playing between the ages of 16 and 66, from all professions and all walks of life. Gerrand says the club really is a centre of the community.

The final scores were North 1 South 0; Dick Kerr Ladies Away 3 Home 1; Rose FC 0 APWFC 0.

But the day was about so much more. Jacquie Head was happy that the three matches went according to plan, and is now determined to get a blue plaque erected in Crouch End for Nettie Honeyball.

Final word goes to Kate Gerrand though. "I was just so joyful. This wacky day has been a long time coming and there was just so much positivity amongst spectators and players. Making history come alive and celebrating women's football in a creative way... I'm still exhilarated."





BARCLAYS WOMEN'S SUPER LEAGUE

Rocket Russo

Words: Abbie Smith

Known best for her ability to bring defenders to their knees with fast feet and even faster knuckleballs, Alessia Russo is fast becoming one of the WSL's best attackers.

Russo started her career with Brighton & Hove Albion, making her debut in a 2017 FA Cup Third Round victory against AFC Wimbledon and scoring Albion's first WSL level goal in a 1-1 tie with London Bees. In 2017, the attacker jettied off to the United States to sign for the Atlantic Coast Conference side North Carolina Tar Heels.

During her spell at the University of North Carolina, the forward made 57 appearances and scored 28 goals. In just her second season, she earned a United Soccer Coaches first-team All-America selection, becoming the first Tar Heel to achieve this since Crystal Dunn in 2013. She also managed to give the Tar Heels their first league title since 2008, resulting in her being named ACC Offensive Player of the Year. In her final year with the club, Russo scored 13 goals in 24 appearances, helping Tar Heels to retain their league title and win the 2019 ACC Women's Soccer Tournament.

Russo penned a two-year deal with Manchester United Women in September 2020 and



Bettina Weissensteiner/SPP

made her debut just three days later, bagging an assist in United's 5-2 victory over Birmingham City. The attacker made a blistering start to her United career, registering three goals and two assists in five games, a run that saw her nominated for the WSL Player of the Month award in October.

In the 21/22 season, Russo was United's top scorer, netting 11 times in all competitions and winning the highly regarded Player's Player of the Year award.

United's number 23 became the first Red to score a WSL hat-trick during their 5-1 win over Leicester in March 2023. This was Russo's first treble in United colours. Her technical ability often sees her score the winning goal in crunch matches, most recently netting United's only goal of the game against title rivals Arsenal, to extend their lead at the top of the WSL. In the closing stages of the reverse fixture in November 2022, Russo's direct header snatched

the three-points from the Gunners; clearly, she loves nothing more than a late goal against Arsenal!

Throughout her career, Russo has been an integral part of the Lionesses squad, representing her country at every age level. Most notably, winning bronze in the 2018 U20 FIFA Women's World Cup and coming off the bench to set the record for the fastest-ever England hat-trick against Latvia in 2021.

England's incredible title-winning Euro 2022 campaign wouldn't have been possible without Russo's contributions. She appeared in all six games, each time as an impact substitution, and scored four goals, including her audacious backheel between the legs of the Sweden goalkeeper. The swift backheel was named Goal of the Tournament and went on to be nominated for the 2022 FIFA Puskás Award.

She was also selected for England's 2023 Arnold Clark Cup campaign and scored once in a 4-0 win over South Korea.

Here come the fans

Words: Clare McEwen



James Whitehead / SPP

A friend said to me the other day, "You've inspired me. I've booked tickets to see Villa Women play in a few weeks' time."

I'm pleased my constant banging on about how good WSL games is rubbing off. But as a football fan, why hadn't she thought of buying tickets before?

In November 2021 the Football Association (FA) set to increase attendance figures at Women's Super League (WSL) games, as part of a plan to grow the game. Before the pandemic, average attendances during the 2019/20 season were around 3,000. The new target is to average 6,000 by 2024. Undoubtedly, crowds in England have increased since the Euros and the appetite for women's football has grown. But how close are The FA to reaching this target?

Arsenal and Tottenham began the 22/23 season by drawing 47,367 fans to the Emirates - a new record attendance. In just 40 WSL games, the total attendance figure (250,000) for the 2021/22 season was surpassed. Recently reported figures show during the first half of the season, WSL attendances were up a massive 267% from last year, averaging over 6,900 fans per game.

As well as an obvious boost from the Euros, these figures have been helped by games being held in major stadiums. These fixtures are promoted more heavily than those at the women's home stadiums and can hold larger audiences. The Manchester derby at the Etihad brought in over 44,000 spectators in December; Manchester United's Old Trafford December clash with Aston Villa brought in 30,000 spectators, setting a

new club record; and Arsenal versus Chelsea at the Emirates attracted nearly 47,000 spectators in January. Big stadium games bring in more fans. Games at the women's home grounds are also seeing increasing crowds, with records being regularly broken this season.

There are, however, big differences in attendance figures across the league. For example, Arsenal has the highest average attendances at over 17,000 per game. Manchester United average over 10,000 per game, and Manchester City and Chelsea around 8,000 per game. At the other end of the scale, Reading average around 2,000 per game and West Ham around 1,500. Despite the disparities, overall average attendance figures are on track to meet the FA's target of 6,000, a year ahead of schedule.

As my story at the start suggests, there are fans who would come to a WSL game but haven't yet. Why? And what can we do to encourage these fans into stadiums?

I'm sure there are many factors, but I think awareness is a key one. For example, my friend was amazed at the price of the tickets. We've been accustomed to the - often ridiculous - cost of Premier League tickets, so many people probably assume the prices for women's matches are similar. But tickets for women's games are usually only a few quid. I pay less for two adults and my son to watch Manchester United Women at Old Trafford than it would cost for half a men's ticket. (Actually, I could get a Women's season ticket for less than a single Premier League game at the Theatre of Dreams!) We get to see a great match and experience the atmosphere of Old Trafford for less than it costs to go to the cinema.

For parents of football mad girls and boys, WSL matches provide an affordable family day out, great entertainment, and strong role models. Promoting this side of the sport would surely boost attendances further. I don't believe these prices are sustainable as the game grows, but for now, they can help build a following. (Although low prices

great for fans, I suspect they may also be the reason match attendances are often lower than expected from ticket sales: you could buy them on a whim and not worry if later you couldn't make it. I'm sure this is much less common in the men's game.)

Another massive draw for going to watch a WSL game is the relaxed, family-oriented atmosphere. Men's football has (with good reason) a rowdy reputation, but women's matches don't feel like that. The seats are filled with families: excited young girls looking for their idols; excited young boys watching the stars on the pitch (who are their heroes too because they're unburdened by attitudes of the past); excited mums enjoying the long-awaited rise of the women's game (OK, that's me!); and men who are watching, enjoying and fully supporting football. The atmosphere isn't at all intimidating. Women's games are football for families.

The WSL is also attracting its own unique audience away from the stadiums: people who only watch women's football. In 2022, 8.4 million people watched live WSL football on TV but didn't watch any Premier League football. Accessibility may play a part here, with more WSL games shown on free-to-view TV compared to pay-per-view Premier League games, but women's football is clearly building its own audience

too. Families with young girls or women who play/have played probably make up a big percentage of this new TV audience - encouraging them to attend matches would grow attendance figures further. More accessible (free-to-view) televised games would presumably help to grow the game further, hopefully changing some long-held attitudes that somehow the women's game is less valid.

There's no doubt the 2022/23 WSL season has been hugely successful. Record attendances, increasing TV audiences, exciting matches, and an ever-growing presence in mainstream media. The FA's target of increasing average attendance figures looks set to be achieved a year early, and the World Cup will further increase the interest in the women's game.

Given the TV audience numbers, there's still plenty more people to entice out to the grounds. What needs to be done to attract them? I'd start with awareness. Promote the games at the women's stadiums in the same way as those held at major stadiums. Highlight ticket prices and the value they represent. Highlight the family atmosphere you simply don't get at men's games.

And tell all your friends!

When will we get a break?

By Clare McEwen



"Oh no! Not another one." A phrase I'm saying far too often at the moment. Every time I look on social media or any footballing news, there's another top-flight woman with a season-ending injury.

Arsenal alone have suffered four, FOUR, anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injuries this season: Vivianne Miedema, Beth Mead, Leah Williamson, and now Laura Wienroither. By anyone's definition, this is more than bad luck.

Chloe Kelly only just made it back to fitness before last year's Euros after her ACL injury, and Alexia Putellas - Barcelona's two-times Ballon d'Or winner - missed out completely after tearing her ACL the day before the tournament started. Simone Magill made it to the Euros to achieve her dream of playing in a major tournament for Northern Ireland, only for it to turn into a nightmare. After 80 minutes she left the field in mental and

physical agony after rupturing her ACL. Later in the tournament France's Marie-Antoinette Katoto would suffer the same fate, leaving early with, yes, you guessed it, an ACL injury.

Although ACLs get the headlines, there is an ever-growing list of other serious injuries in the women's game. I doubt it's coincidence that many of these injuries involve high-profile stars who play for both club and country. Millie Bright has been out since March with a knee injury; Fran Kirby has been ruled out of the World Cup whilst she undergoes knee surgery; Kim Little had her season ended by a hamstring injury. Honestly, I'm scared to even watch every time a Lioness is on the pitch - Lucy Bronze underwent surgery on her knee recently too (although this is hopefully a more short-term recovery).

These injuries aren't just a headache for club managers and international coaches; not

just a cause for concern for fans. These women - people as well as footballers - are facing the devastation of missing out on major tournaments, lengthy interruptions to their careers, and months of pain, immobility, and tough rehabilitation. The current spate of high-profile injuries cannot be ignored.

So why are there so many injuries? Research needs to continue to help pinpoint the causes, but hormonal changes, physiology, and inappropriate football boots have all been implicated. It will take time to build a body of research to explain exactly how they contribute; what other factors are involved; whether combinations of factors increase the risk further; what can be done to address these causes; and ultimately how does this translate to reducing injury risk. However, there is, one major factor that could be addressed quickly: reducing the ridiculous fixture schedule.

This could have a near immediate impact on player wellbeing.

Currently, players at top clubs in England are juggling WSL games, Champions League football, and major tournaments each summer, as well as international qualifying campaigns, invitational tournaments, and friendlies. This is echoed around the world at the top level. And it's unsustainable.

If we look at the post-pandemic years, the schedule is brutal. In 2021 we had the pandemic-delayed Olympics in Tokyo. Millie Bright, Leah Williamson, Fran Kirby, Viv Miedema, and Kim Little all took part. After games in pre-season, there were 22 games for each WSL team during the 2021/22 season. Chelsea, for example, also played all five rounds of the FA Cup, three games in the League Cup, and 12 Champions League matches. Arsenal played four rounds of the FA Cup, one in the League Cup, and eight Champions League matches. That season, Millie Bright, Leah Williamson, Beth Mead, Kim Little, and Viv Miedema all made over 30 appearances each for their clubs. And then came the Euros. To recap, these women played through the summer at the Tokyo Olympics in 2021, through a full domestic season, and then went straight onto a summer filled with the

Euros: plus training and friendlies.

A couple of weeks off after the Euros and then back into another full WSL season with Champions League football for the top clubs too. Fast forward and we have the World Cup this summer - another summer with no break; that's three in a row if you're counting. Back to the domestic season and then the Olympics in Paris in 2024. There's not even a break after that since we're back to the Euros in 2025 to resume its normal four-year cycle post-Covid!

Teams in the Champions League and domestic cup competitions often only have three days between games, and top players rarely miss matches - until they are injured, that is. In the first six months of this season, Millie Bright (who probably gets more minutes than most) played over 2,000 minutes. In October/November 2022, she played eight games in 31 days for Chelsea after playing every one of England's games in the Euros! And that's without including the international qualifiers, friendlies, the Arnold Clark Cup...

You don't need to be a genius to see this is unsustainable!

It isn't only physical fatigue that leads to more injuries. Manchester United's boss

Marc Skinner recently commented on how mental fatigue has an impact too:

"It's a really difficult balance.

"When a player is mentally fatigued it opens up the argument that it could lead to physical injury as well.

"As a club, we have them the most so it's important we keep on track with how they're feeling.

"It's a tough run of games when you're playing week in week out and then for your country too."

There are many factors contributing to the high numbers of serious injuries in women's football right now.

Biology, physiology, footwear, and training all play their part. Research is needed to determine how each of these can be best mitigated to protect individuals from the most severe injuries. But the low hanging fruit here, the quick fix that will undoubtedly have a major impact, is the fixture schedule. Reducing the number of games played and increasing the time between games is the most efficient way to reduce the mental and physical burden our top-class footballers are currently carrying.

FA professional game Academy licences awarded

The FA is pleased to confirm the awarding of 20 Professional Game Academy Licences (PGAs) for the 2023/24 season to clubs in the Barclays Women's Super League and Barclays Women's Championship, with the academies forming part of the new look player pathway.

The revised pathway, which was announced in February, intends to identify and develop the very best talent in England, while also making the game more diverse, accessible and inclusive.

The PGAs will replace the 16 current FA WSL Academies and will provide a high-quality training environment to ensure players coming out of the pathway are ready to compete at the highest levels of the domestic and international game.

The PGAs, which have been developed following an extensive consultation period across the game, will come to fruition in the 2023/24 season and will cater for the development of talented female players between the ages of 14 to 20.

Initially, 20 clubs have been awarded licenses for the 2023/24 season.

All 24 Barclays Women's Super League and Barclays Women's Championship clubs will be required to deliver an academy by the 2025/26 season.

Clubs have been awarded either a Category 1 license, which will see two age groups catered for, or a Category 2 license, which will cater for one. The age groups will be identified to fit the club's development model. The PGAs will see a significant increase in investment into the game through FA and club contributions.

The clubs who have been awarded licenses are as follows:

Category 1: Arsenal, Aston Villa, Birmingham City, Brighton & Hove Albion, Bristol City, Chelsea, Durham, Everton, Leicester City, Liverpool, London City Lionesses, Manchester City, Manchester United, Sheffield United

Category 2: Blackburn Rovers, Charlton Athletic, Reading, Sunderland

Kay Cossington, The FA's Women's Technical Director, said: "Our Professional Game Academies form a key stage of our player pathway. It is at this point that the player becomes ready for top level football but also develops them as a person so they're prepared for life in and out of the game.

"We are grateful to the 20 clubs across the country who have recognised their importance and shown a real commitment to player progression and development. We look forward to working with them closely as they develop the next generation of talent and evolve our game for the future."

BARCLAYS WSL NEWS



Kelly Smith has joined Arsenal's coaching team until the end of the season. Smith had three spells with the Gunners between 1996 and 1997, 2005 and 2009 and 2012 and 2017, scoring 125 goals in 144 appearances. She won five League titles, five Women's FA Cups, three Women's Community Shields, one FA Women's Premier League Cup and the UEFA Women's Cup with the club. The former Lionesses entered the WSL Hall of Fame in 2021, recognising her contribution to the Women's Super League. Smith said "it was a really easy decision to join the coaching set-up".

Tottenham Hotspur have announced the first ever WSL/Premier League double-header at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium on Saturday 20th May.

The men's match against Brentford will kick off at 12:30pm with the women's following at 4:15pm when they take on Reading.

Spurs said on their website that "all tickets for the Premier League fixture will now be inclusive of the WSL fixture, giving regular followers of our Men's team a fantastic opportunity to make a day of it at the stadium and show their support for Spurs Women in what is set to be a crucial match in the fight for top-flight survival." Further ticket information regarding the WSL match will be realised shortly.

Manchester City have appointed Nils Nielsen as their director of football. Nielsen has previously managed Switzerland and Denmark's women's national sides, guiding the Danes to the Euro 2017 final.

At City, it is reported he will take charge of coach and player development across the women's first team setup and also lead on player recruitment across the entirety of the women's and girls pathway. After joining the club, Nielsen said "Moving away from coaching and into a directorial role, it is ultimately about making a difference.



Brighton & Hove Albion have appointed Melissa Phillips as their new head coach.

The former London City Lionesses head coach had spent a short spell as assistant head coach at National Women's Soccer League side Angel City since leaving the Women's Championship side in January.

On joining the Seagulls, Phillips said "I'm excited to be here and eager to get started. It's an amazing feeling to join this club and I'm looking forward to working with the team. I had positive talks with the club and I knew it was the right decision to return to England. I am fully aware of our position, but confident we can grow and move up the table."

Mead pays homage to Arsenal legend



UEFA Women's EURO winner Beth Mead joined Arsenal and Scotland legend Julie Fleetwood to celebrate her memories of winning the 2007 UEFA Women's Cup, becoming the first English team to win a major European honour.

In a career laden with goals, Julie turned provider in 2007 – setting up Alex Scott for the winner against Umeå of Sweden.

UEFA Women's Champions League heroes from the past and present have been paired together by UEFA to pay homage to the iconic achievements of the tournament's trailblazers.

Stars that shone before the explosion of awareness in the women's game in the past five years have had their greatest moments recreated through a series of limited edition tees designed by Barcelona-based artist Xavier Mula.

As part of the

Queens of Football campaign, Mula has given a contemporary twist to seminal heritage moments in the UWCL – featuring four teams that have previously won Europe's leading club competition.

Julie Fleetwood (Arsenal), Sonia Bermúdez (Barcelona), Conny Pohlers (Wolfsburg) and Lotta Schelin (Lyon) have had their most memorable moments recreated in a vivid collection of tees, with their clubs' contemporary stars the first to try them on for size.

The inspiring generational crossover involved England Lioness Beth Mead (Arsenal), star striker Claudia Pina (Barcelona), current UWCL top scorer Ewa Pajor (Wolfsburg) and 2022 UWCL Young Player of the Season Selma Bacha (Lyon).

Each came together with the legend of the past to share celebrate their respective feats in taking women's football forward.

Beth Mead: "It was great to spend time with Julie and be part of commemorating her greatest moment with Arsenal.

"Julie's side became the first English club to win a European title, setting the benchmark for English sides in the Women's Champions League.

"Hearing her memories of playing for Arsenal show how far women's football has grown thanks to the efforts of players like Julie.

"The Women's Champions League gives us the opportunity to be tested against the best players and clubs in Europe."

Julie Fleetwood: "It's been incredible to see the growth of Arsenal and women's football since I hung up my boots.

"I loved working with Xavier to bring my favourite UEFA Women's Champions League memory to life. Winning the trophy in front

of our home crowd was one of greatest moments in my career.

"I really enjoyed spending time with Beth. She has achieved so much in her career already.

"I'm really excited for this Arsenal team to create even more unforgettable moments in Europe this season and in the years to come."

Lotta Schelin enjoyed a trophy-laden career with Lyon, winning the UWCL three times with the French side. Joined by current French international Selma Bacha, Lotta shared her memories of the 2011 semi-final, where two goals against Arsenal helped Lyon on their way to the first of a record 8 UWCL wins.

In 2013, VfL Wolfsburg continued a proud tradition in the UWCL, becoming the fourth German club to lift the trophy.

Ewa Pajor linked up with UWCL goal scoring legend Conn Pohlers to champion her key role in Wolfsburg's journey to the Final, scoring a crucial away goal in the Semi-Final against Arsenal.

Having scored in all three prior knockout rounds, this goal was extra-special, taking Conny to the top of the

all-time UWCL scoring charts. Conny would end her career on 48 UWCL goals, a tally only since bettered by Ada Hegerberg (59) and Anja Mittag (51).

FC Barcelona are one of the leading sides in women's football in Europe today, regularly breaking attendance records in the UWCL.

Claudia Pina came together with Sonia Bermúdez to highlight the key role that she played in the development of the club, scoring pivotal goals against FC Zürich to take her team to the Quarter-Finals of the UWCL for the first time in their history.

As the first Spanish team to reach that stage, the achievements of Sonia's team paved the way for the incredible success to come, culminating in lifting the UWCL for the first time in 2021.

The current and legend players will be appearing in photo and video content throughout the season.

The Greatest Moment Tees will take centre stage at an exclusive event in advance of the UWCL Final in Eindhoven on the 3rd June, where all four legend players will be in attendance.



QUESTIONS

DO YOU HAVE ANY RITUALS OR SUPERSTITIONS BEFORE A GAME?

I DON'T HAVE TOO MANY BUT WHEN I AM PLAYING INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL I LIKE TO BE ON THE FRONT LEFT-HAND SIDE IN THE LINE-UP.

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY YOUR CAREER HIGHLIGHT IS SO FAR?

DEFINITELY SCORING MY GOAL AT THE WOMEN'S EUROS IN SOUTHAMPTON AND BEING THE FIRST NI PLAYER TO SCORE AT A MAJOR TOURNAMENT, I WILL NEVER FORGET IT.

WHO IS THE BEST PLAYER YOU HAVE EVER PLAYED AGAINST?

FROM RECENT EXPERIENCE AND THE IMPACT SHE HAD ON THE GAME AGAINST US I WOULD SAY CAROLINE GRAHAM HANSEN FROM NORWAY, ALTHOUGH YOU COULD NAME HALF THE ENGLAND TEAM!

DO YOU HAVE ANY SET PRE-MATCH FOOD?

TOAST AND BANANA, OR CEREAL.

WHO WOULD YOU SAY YOUR BEST FRIEND IN FOOTBALL IS?

TOUGH QUESTION, I HAVE SO MANY I COULDN'T PICK ONE PERSON OUT!

WHAT IS THE HARDEST MOMENT OF YOUR CAREER SO FAR?

TEARING MY CRUCIATE WHEN I WAS ONLY 19, I WAS ON SCHOLARSHIP IN AMERICA AT THE TIME AND I HAD TO WATCH EVERYONE TRAIN AND PLAY FOR 10 MONTHS, THAT WAS REALLY HARD.

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

AGAIN TOUGH BUT AMY MCGIVERN.

WHO IS YOUR BIGGEST SUPPORTER?

MY MUM AND DAD.

WHAT IS THE DRESSING ROOM ATMOSPHERE LIKE BEFORE GAMES?

INTERNATIONALLY IT'S LIKE A PINCH ME MOMENT THAT I AM ACTUALLY THERE AND THEN I TRY AND TO GET IN THE ZONE BEFORE WE GO OUT ONTO THE PITCH.

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

AS I AM NOT A FULL TIME PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALLER I DO HAVE ANOTHER FULL TIME JOB AT THE ULSTER UNIVERSITY. OTHER COUNTRIES PROBABLY DON'T REALISE THAT NI FOOTBALLERS AREN'T FULL TIME, WE ARE ALL PART-TIME AND ALL OF US HAVE TO WORK AS WELL AS TRAIN AND PLAY FOOTBALL.



Julie
Nelson 5



THE LIFE OF A SUPER FAN

By Abbie Smith

WSL superfan Emma sat down to talk us through her footballing journey, her favourite team, and how meeting Caitlin Foord in Morrisons changed her life...

First of all, Emma, what team do you support?

I am a Chelsea fan, have been since around the age of 5 when I first got into football.

Who's your favourite player?

Guro Reiten.

What is your favourite match you've watched so far?

For club it would have to be last season's FA Cup Final when we beat Man City 3-2. Watching the team lift the trophy was such an amazing experience. For country, it would definitely have to be the Euro 2022 final. The pure elation when Chloe Kelly scored the winner! Going to watch the Lionesses beat USA at Wembley is also up there.

How did it feel to go to Wembley and watch the girls play on such a big stage?

It was so amazing, one of the best days of my life. It was my first time at Wembley so to watch that

special team win and continue their unbeaten streak was incredible. The growth in support for women's football was surreal to see in person, especially compared to matches I watched in previous seasons.

Have you met any WSL players? If so, who and where?

I met Katie McCabe and Caitlin Foord at Bramall Lane before the Switzerland vs Netherlands game. We were all in the queue for food, definitely not something I was expecting. Funnily enough, I'd met Caitlin Foord the previous week in a random Morrisons which was a great experience. She was buying a baguette!

My mum and I also met Jill Scott at Boxx2Boxx. She let me hold her medal and talked to me for ages about GCSEs and her time on the pitch. Jill is lovely, I'll never forget meeting her.

Finally, if you could go back in time and attend one match, which would it be?

The Euros final. Watching it at home with my sister was emotional enough, I can't imagine the adrenaline that the fans felt watching it live.



BARCLAYS CHAMPIONSHIP



Durham offer route to professional football

Durham Women and Bede Sixth Form are delighted to announce a continuation of their partnership by entering into a long-term agreement that will provide aspiring female footballers in Tees Valley a route to the professional game.

Durham, who play in the Barclays Women's Championship, will work with Bede's Institute of Sport and Education (ISE) to operate a Women's Football Academy at the education provider, as the two organisations continue to build on an already successful link.

Players on the dual-career programme will benefit from expert coaching and lifestyle support, as well as being able to select from a range of A-Levels and BTECs to ensure they don't have to compromise on their education.

The team will compete in the AOC Premiership against a range of high-quality opposition, after Bede Sixth Form's women's football team this year won the NECL Premiership.

And there is also the chance for players on the programme to represent professional outfit Durham – after the club were last week awarded one of a limited number of Category One Professional Game Academy's licences, and the only one in the North East.

This further builds on Durham and Bede's already successful partnership which has seen a number of players progress into the club's set-up.

Faye Dale and Lily Patrick are both Bede alumni who featured for Durham's academy side

this season, while former student Eleanor Dale represented the Wildcats' first team and was recently called up for the England under-23 squad.

And in an exciting additional element of the partnership, some of Durham Women's successful pathway teams will also utilise Bede Sixth Form's superb facilities for on and off-field training.

Commenting on the new partnership, Lee Sanders of Durham Women said: "We're delighted to continue the club's relationship with Bede Sixth Form.

"They have supported current and previous athletes with their dual-career aspirations while competing with ourselves in the WSL Academy League."

Ian Hewitt, Institute of Sport and Education Lead at Bede Sixth Form, added: "We are delighted to continue our partnership with Durham Women FC.

"We have worked together to create a strong Academy at Bede Sixth Form College and Durham help us provide our students with a professional route into football which is completely unique within the Tees Valley area.

"The Women's Academy have won the NECL Premiership this year and we will be stepping up into the AOC Premiership in order to really challenge the players and help them develop further."

If you want to find out more then check out the information on the Durham website.

Bristol City back on top and in WSL

By Peter Mann



The season has finished in the Barclays Women's Championship, and Lauren Smith's Bristol City have been promoted back to the Women's Super League, by a point, from the eventual runners-up in Darren Carter's Birmingham City.

Bristol, who were relegated from the WSL when finishing bottom, in 2021, have gone up at the second attempt, having finished in third place in 2022, wrapping up the title with a game to spare, winning 4-0 at home to Charlton Athletic in late April.

Granted the newly-crowned champions lost their final match, at Birmingham, but their mission was already accomplished following the demolition of the Addicks.

Grace Clinton got the party started with the opening goal, midway through the first half, whilst Abi Harrison added a second shortly after the restart, before late goals, in the final ten minutes, from Brooke Aspin and

Ffion Morgan, completed the rout.

Lauran Smith's side have not been out of the top two since victory on the second week of the season, and held top spot for thirteen, of the twenty weeks, Clinton's goal, in the win over the Addicks, pushed her into the top ten scorers for the season, teammate Shania Hayles joint-second with eleven to her name.

London City Lionesses meanwhile, who said goodbye to then-manager, Melissa Phillips back in January, she having initially gone to America before reappearing in the WSL, at Brighton & Hove Albion, signing a two-and-a-half year contract, just last month, finished in third place.

Having been in the top two, and challenging for the title, at promotion, for the middle, fifteen weeks, it's a disappointing slip, interim manager, Nikita Runnacles, now the season has finished, with a thumping

9-0 home win over relegated Coventry United, has already lost shot-stopper, Shae Yanez.

The 25-year-old American has returned stateside, having been snapped up by National Women's Soccer League side, San Diego Wave, following a club record, 24 clean sheets, in just 72 appearances for the Princes Park club.

Of her departure, Shae said: "It's been a very special time here. "Football always has ups and downs, but London City has given me the opportunity to find myself and grow as a person and as a player.

"Thanks to my teammates and the staff at the Club for setting the culture here.

"I'm really excited to get some sunshine in my life and live near the beach.

"This is a huge opportunity for me in my career and I'm excited to see what

doors it opens in the future.”

Her final game, the five-goal thriller away to Blackburn Rovers, in the second last game of the season, the final weekends’ demolition of Coventry seeing 19-year-old Hermione Cull keep her first clean sheet, the Lionesses setting a club record victory, in a game which saw Jamie-Lee Napier net a nine-minute, first half hat-trick.

London’s title hopes, they evaporated when they crashed to a late defeat on the South Coast, Katie Wilkinson scoring with seven minutes left of Southampton’s 1-0 win, her side eventually finishing mid-table; Wilkinson also netted the opener the following week in the 4-0 win at Coventry.

That week would see four Championship sides hit four, Bristol seeing off Charlton, Southampton away to Coventry, alongside home wins for Crystal Palace and Sheffield United. Palace, who finished fifth, fourteen points off champions Bristol, defeated visitors Lewes 4-1, in a game which saw plenty of stoppage time – Coral-Jade Haines netted from the spot in the fifth minute at the end of the first, whilst Rianna Dean wrapped up the points, with the fourth goal for the hosts, in the 100th minute.

The game would go on for close to a further ten minutes as well, time being added

to the game due to a head injury to Lewes’ German-born, Irish international, Emily Kraft.

Meanwhile, at the bottom end of the table, the Blades and the Black Cats shared six goals, the hosts, Sheffield United, finishing as 4-2 victors against their Sunderland visitors.

Of those six goals, five of them arrived in a rather hectic, first half as Sophie Haywood, Courtney Sweetman-Kirk, Mia Enderby, and Rebecca Rayner, in stoppage time, netted for the Blades, Emily Scarr pulling a goal back in the middle of the four. Late on in the game, with eight minutes remaining, Kosovan-born forward, Elizabeta Ejupi, grabbed a second for the visitors, adding a little more parity to the score-line; the Blades would finish in eighth, the Black Cats, eleventh.

Lee Sanders’ Durham side did enough to register a mid-table finish when, having lost a handful of games, narrowly, they picked off Lewes in their last game, to win 2-1. The hosts, having taken an interval lead through Natalie Johnson, at The Dripping Pan, were undone in the second period, thanks to goals at the start and finish if the half.

Beth Hepple equalised four minutes into the half, before, four minutes into stoppage time, Deidre Bradley heading home

the winner to which afterwards, captain Sarah Wilson said of their season: “It’s a disappointing season, we know we’ve said that. We want to be finishing higher, we want to be challenging, want to be up there. But it’s been a really, really difficult one. We’ve obviously had a huge transition within the club, there’s been a lot of movement, the club’s going in the right direction.

“I guess we were just a bit naive at the beginning, that’s how we will reflect on it.... there’s still a lot of positives to come out of it and the direction the clubs going is exactly where it needs to be and that’s the most important thing. We’ll go away, reflect on our own seasons and as a team, and come back ready to be flying at the beginning of July.”

Coventry meanwhile, they found themselves relegated with three games remaining, eventually finishing the campaign on just seven points (two wins and a draw), and eleven points adrift of second-bottom Sunderland.

Lee Burch’s side have propped up the table for all bar the opening weekend of the season, and eventually bit the bullet, at the start of April, following their 1-1 draw away to Lewes; it was the final nail in the coffin of what has been a torrid season for the West Midlands club.

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CHAMPIONSHIP NEWS DESK



Sunderland announce new hybrid model

Sunderland have announced that they will adopt a hybrid playing model for the 2023/24 season. The new model will allow several members of the team to switch to full-time professional status while others can remain part-time and continue with their careers away from football. This move follows manager Melanie Reay and assistant Steph Libbey's decisions to go full-time last year. Sunderland's Sporting Director Kristiaan Speakman said "Following promotion in 2021, the Club has made an assured transition to the second tier. We remain committed to playing our part in the development of the women's game."

Runnacles finishes interim run

London City Lionesses interim head coach Nikita Runnacles has taken charge of the side for the last time. Runnacles took over after Melissa Phillips departure in January with the side finishing third. She has confirmed that she will revert back to a coaching role next season after London City Lionesses appoint a new head coach over the summer. Runnacles said "From the off, there have been very open conversations between myself and the board, I don't see myself in the head coach position going forward. I like the goalkeeping side of it, catching and kicking, so I see myself moving back into that role."



Donnelly leaves Blackburn Rovers

Blackburn Rovers manager Gemma Donnelly left the club by mutual consent at the start of April. She had been manager since November 2013, overseeing a rise up the pyramid. Donnelly helped the club to win three FA Women's Premier League Northern Division titles, two Premier Division cups, and won promotion to the Women's Championship in 2019. Before becoming Blackburn's manager, she had spent six-and-a-half years working with Blackburn Rovers Centre of Excellence. Matt Bee took over as interim manager until the end of the season with the club finishing in 10th position.

The



TWFM TIMES

This month in history is your TWFM guide to the interesting women's football events that have happened each month, throughout the years. Let's take a look at the important events that happened in the month of May.

These have helped to pave the way for women's football as we know it.

The first ever recorded Women's football match took place 142 years ago this month

On 7 May 1881 in Edinburgh, a 'Scotland' women's team played 'England' in what is now thought to be the first ever recorded game of women's football. It is, however, believed at least some of the players were from the local theater community and 'acting' out these roles within the team.

Lily St Clair scored the opening goal in this game. With her strike going down in history as the first recorded female goal in the history of the game. Scotland went on to beat England 3-0 on the day.

It's been 34 years since the first ever England women's football match at Wembley

The very first England women's international match played at Wembley (England vs Sweden) took place on 23 May 1989. As a 'warm up' before a men's international kick off. Something that, given the scenes we've seen at Wembley over the past few months, seems incredible to fathom now.

The match was put on to mark the 20th anniversary of the Women's Football Association (WFA), and drew a crowd of just over 3,000 spectators. England women went on to lose this first match at Wembley Stadium.

Failing to score against an impressive Swedish side, who put two past England. Pia Sundhage and Lena Videkull were the scorers.

The first ever Women's FA Cup Final took place 53 years ago this month!

The Women's FA Cup was founded in 1970 sponsored as the Mitre Challenge Trophy until April 1976. It was the first women's national football competition, organised by the now defunct Women's Football Association.

This first competition had 71 different entrants, which were then placed in groups by geography. It even included teams from Scotland and Wales.

This culminated in the first ever Women's FA Cup final, which took place in London on 9 May 1971. While the finals are now played in front of record crowds at Wembley Stadium, this first was held at the Crystal Palace National Recreation Centre in London. Southampton beat Scottish side Stewarton 4-1 in a thrilling game. They went onto defend this title for three years back-to-back.

Palace welcome new officer



Crystal Palace are pleased to welcome Naomi Moore as the Women's team's new Safeguarding & Player Welfare Officer.

Moore joins Palace's expanding Safeguarding department following 22 years working in public service, 17 of which were spent looking after the welfare of young children and adults.

She joins the established Safeguarding team at Palace, led by Cassi Wright, Head of Safeguarding, to help provide a safe, positive and

enjoyable environment for all involved with Crystal Palace Football Club.

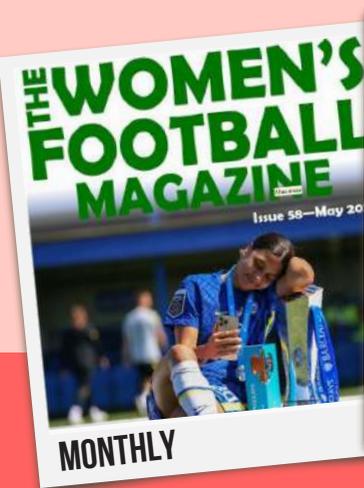
The Safeguarding team work closely with players and staff at all levels to protect individuals, listen and respond to their needs, and to ensure safeguarding is embedded throughout the club.

Moore said: "I'm very excited to get started. It's really nice to be able to come in and work with an established group of players, and support them

improving both on and off the field.

"The profile of women in sport is growing massively, especially in football with the success of the Lionesses. Having a dedicated Safeguarding Officer at Palace to support the women is brilliant."

Everybody at Crystal Palace would like to welcome Naomi and wish her all the best for her time with the club.



CELEBRATING WOMEN'S FOOTBALL FROM GRASSROOTS TO THE HOME NATIONS

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THE FA NATIONAL LEAGUE

Forest On Fire

By Peter Mann



Nottingham Forest and Watford Women, could not be separated from their respective paths going into the FA Women's National League Cup final, and it showed, extra-time being needed to separate what was a five-goal thriller.

An entertaining, end-to-end final, saw the first goal arrive in the opening minutes, Gemma Davison giving Watford the lead as the Southern Premier Division side edged the opening quarter.

Chances ebbed-and-flowed, Forest midfielder, Mai Moncaster, crashing an effort off Jacqui Goldsmid's crossbar at one end, Emily Batty pulling off a save at the other end from Japanese forward, Faye Brough, soon after.

The equaliser arrived minutes before the interval, Charlotte Greengrass firing home what was her 22 goal of a very productive season, the sides going in level, 1-1, at the break.

Forest started the second period stronger and

within minutes of the re-start, Yasmin Mosby saw her effort blocked, Moncaster sending the rebound flying over Goldsmid's bar, then followed a game of ping-pong with the Forest attack, the triumvirate of Greengrass, Becky Anderson, and Hayley James, seeing further efforts blocked in quick succession.

The relentless attacking prowess of Forest continued, being rewarded when taking the lead, for the first time, after 52 minutes; Anderson's effort, from distance, came back off the crossbar, Mosby on hand to head home.

Ten minutes later and, with both sides very evenly matched, Watford snatched an equaliser of their own, albeit a little wind-assisted, following a cross which led to a goalmouth scramble, a shot palmed onto the bar by Batty, and Poppy Wilson on hand to head home.

A penalty claim for Watford was waved away shortly after, following a coming together just

inside the Forest box, before a deep cross from Amy West is cleared at the back post, the contest going to extra-time.

The end-to-end nature continued throughout the extra thirty, both sides continually plugging away at each other.

Then, with penalties looking in the offing, simple play through the Watford defence saw Anderson knock a ball through to substitute, Gianna Mitchell, she slotting home a 115 minute winner, affording Forest the win.

Nottingham Forest lifted the first of two pieces of silverware in a week, following it up with winning the Northern Premier Division title, for the first time since 2008.

Congratulations on a fantastic season Nottingham Forest.



**London
Bees**



**LONDON
BEES**

ESTABLISHED 197



DON'T WORRY, BEE HAPPY

London Bees manager Marie Hourihan strides towards our picnic table outside the Hive stadium, where we sit in the spring sunshine and chat about everything, from her illustrious club and international career, to blazing a trail by playing abroad.

Words: Helen Jerome

She talks knowledgeably about role models, women's football as a whole, the National League in particular, and her old teammate and national treasure, Jill Scott. She's also forthright about her own roll call of injuries: "two fractured hips, a broken collar bone, ankle ligament injuries... plus too many broken fingers."

Two hours later she's in action, picking up her goalkeeper's gloves to go between the sticks for the final Bees game of season, against Bridgwater on the 5G pitch. She shouts instructions, tactics and encouragement all match, saves a second half penalty, and the Bees win 4-0 despite having a player sent off. Main thing, their spot is safe in the National League South next season.

Who first got you into football? What can you remember of your first match? I'd probably say it's because I had an older brother, I just wanted to do everything that he did. He was running around like a lunatic with the ball, so I was like: I've got to join in. He's four years older, so it was from that point on, when I was about four or five, as soon as I had any sort of coordination.

My first game was seeing the FA Cup Final between Man U and Chelsea at the old Wembley. Me and my dad and my brother went down to the local pub and watched the game. Ever since that I was just fascinated by football. My brother and uncles are all big Man U fans, so that was always quite big in our household. Secretively I'm a Man U fan, but if I'm honest I'm more of a local

team, a Watford fan, from afar.

Tell me about making the transition from player to manager... did you get much advice, and do you have mentors or role models?

I worked under a lot of very good managers; under Emma Hayes at Chelsea, and Hope Powell at Brighton. So in terms of female figureheads I had some very good examples. A lot of parts of their ways of working definitely rubbed off on me, in being consistent and being authentic. They're two of the biggest things

I think are really important, especially in the female game, because it's a lot more personable. Also throughout my international career (for Ireland) I worked under Colin Bell, who in organisation and being tactically astute, I learned a lot from. So I've had a good grounding in my



career and worked with good people. I've been very fortunate.

Are you doing your coaching badges?

I'm just finishing my A licence, I finish next month, so then I'll be qualified to the highest level except for the pro licence. Even that process has been brilliant, because I've been on the course with a lot of ex-professionals, so in terms of mentors and learning, you learn through your peers don't you? I've had really good guidance from the guys on the course. That's helped me massively even this year, in what I've been able to do with the team.

Why aren't there more goalkeepers as managers? Few

have achieved this successfully in women's or men's leagues, maybe Ray Clemence at Barnet?

Probably because a lot of people forget about goalkeepers. From an analytical point of view we're far more attuned. Being in games and viewing games you see a lot more. That's definitely helped, and also the communication side because that's a huge part of the game. You definitely hear me! In developing relationships it gives you a massive head start because you're consistently speaking to the players on the pitch, so taking that from being a player into being a coach has been quite easy. I've been doing it consistently for such a long time.

Presume this season you didn't

expect to be called into action as much?

Ha, yes, obviously I retired from professional football last May...

You don't seem to have done a very good job of it? You're Frank Sinatra!

In my head I was done, but unfortunately circumstances arose where it was a case of well, you have to, Marie! There is no other choice. We had a few injuries and other things, so it was a case of needs must. I had to step in and fill in for a little bit, but the most important thing for the team is we've been able to secure our place in the league for next year.

Did that make it even more

**“Year-on-year
the gap is
getting smaller,
it’s difficult to
go
professional.”**

satisfying when you stayed up – and you were playing? Yeah, relief, massive relief. I made a couple of saves, but for the team our biggest problem throughout the season has been consistency. Not just in our performances on the pitch, but in the regularity of having the same players in the squad. For the past five or six weeks we’ve had consistency and it’s a lot more cohesive. That’s probably been the biggest factor of all in getting us over the line.

You’ve played at international level for Ireland, and for some of the best clubs – Chelsea won the league when you were there – what do you think of the standard of the National League?

You can definitely see, without doubt, year-on-year, Tier 3 is getting better and better. I was here last year, I helped out with the goalkeeping coaching while I was still playing, so I saw games then. And even in the difference from last season to this season, there’s been a jump. Undoubtedly it’s a trickle down effect. There’s only 12 teams in the Championship and the WSL, but next season two teams will be promoted from the Northern and Southern Leagues to the Championship. That’s important because if clubs are going to invest in it, there’s got to be window of opportunity.

Perhaps the main thing that holds a lot of women’s football

back is everyone still has to have to have other jobs. Do you see that changing? All the WSL is full-time, and the majority of the Championship except two or three are also full-time. Year-on-year the gap is getting smaller and smaller, so if you’re not professional you’re going to find it really difficult. Clubs are having to invest, and it’s a trickle-down effect. You’re seeing the bigger clubs in our league – like your Watfords, Oxfords, Portsmouths, Ipswich – they all want to go into the top two divisions. They know they have to be prepared and start putting things in place, so they’re training three or four times a week now. But that’s only



London Bees

benefiting Tier 3 and Tier 4 because players are training more consistently and they're going to get better.

You're also getting younger players coming from WSL academies into the league, who are used to training in full-time environments. It's win-win. You can dual-register players who are in under-21 Academy sides, so it's good for both parties. It's exposing younger girls to senior women's football and what it really looks like, and the different challenges that brings. For clubs that have academies, I'd implore them to do it even more.

So, will being part-time change?

You notice when a professional team plays part-timers, you get to the 75th or 80th minute and see the fitness almost fall off a cliff. It's contact time isn't it? If you've got 15 hours contact time over five days, it's simple maths, it's going to add up eventually. Within probably the next five or six years I wouldn't be surprised if three-quarters of the National League is professional. Because that's what it's going to take to be able to compete.

Have you noticed more fans coming? Is there a trickle down post-Euros?

Oh, definitely. I remember at the start of the season, going to Oxford and they had a

600% increase on season ticket sales on the back of the Euros. You're getting teams that regularly get 300 or 400 now. It's just visibility. The more visible the game is, and when people are aware the games are on, they'll come because it's a good standard of football and a good experience, especially for young families, as it's a cheaper option. Kids just see it as football – they don't see it as women's or men's football, it's just football.

Should there be more synergy and ties between men's and women's teams in general, eg London Bees and Barnet FC?

I think so, it's definitely getting there. And it works both ways, if the women's team are doing well it reflects well on the men's team, and you want to attract the loyal supporters that come to the men's team to come to the women's games, even if it is just 10, 15 or 20 to begin with, we want that connection throughout the whole club. I know from when I was at Manchester City there were a lot of hard-core City fans, and it didn't matter if it was the women's team, the men's team or the under-18s; they would go. That's what you've got to try and tap into.

Do you get support from the Barnet men's team manager?

I've spoken to the manager, Dean Brennan, quite a few times to be



fair. (and Brennan even says hello as he passes us during the interview). Obviously their schedule is nuts, they're literally playing every 3 or 4 days, and he'll be in his office doing analysis and stuff and we'll sit and have a chat. So there is that connection there and it's nice, I know some of the players as well. It's a very friendly club in general.

What about the owner, Tony Kleanthous, does he engage much?

Yes, and even tonight we've got a presentation and he's put on a spread for everybody, for friends and family to come in, so undoubtedly there is that interest and connection. And he wants the women's team to do well.

Will you stay and become



permanent Bees manager?

Ha ha. I'm just the interim aren't I? My mindset literally this season has just been to get over the line and keep the team in the league. Obviously we'll sit down with Natasha Kleanthous, the general manager, and have a conversation. We don't want to be in this position going forward. We need to dissect this season, where we can improve, and take it from there. It's the challenge – you have your own jobs and other employment – and it's being able to get the level of commitment and balance right. Once you have that, the sky's the limit. There's quality players here definitely, there's talent.

What are your ambitions for London Bees?

I'm still very young in my coaching career and only a year in. For me it's been the perfect environment and I've learnt a hell of a lot. I've had to do things I didn't expect to, which has been great, in giving me the exposure and experience I need. It's an environment where I can grow as a coach, but equally where I can perfect, improve and help players. I couldn't get a better environment to work in.

While you're watching and playing can you see players blossom and improve, even within the game? And are there Bees players should we look out for?

100% yes. For example, we've got Janaye Beaufort who came to us from West Ham's under-21s this season, so this was her first step into senior football. She's 100% a player who can play at a higher level; she can play in the Championship. It's about growing her gradually and getting her used to senior women's football and the physicality that brings. But technically and tactically she's a player who is well above her age group.

That's the glorious thing about being at this level, you get to meet players like that. Maybe they've been at big clubs and haven't had the opportunities. It's an opportunity to showcase what you can do. And a lot of it is confidence, they are in environments where their training

routines are professional, but they still don't get a taste of that playing in the starting eleven of a first-team. So they've got the fantastic experience of living like a professional, but then at the end of the week they are not having that stimulus, so they bring what they've learnt and been exposed to in the professional environment into here, then showcase themselves in games. It's a perfect match really. She's a player you've definitely really seen, visibly, the difference from the beginning of the season to now.

Anyone else you'd like to pick out?

We've got quite a few experienced players that have played at a higher level, and are invaluable to me this season. For example you've got Ash Goddard,





London Bees

the captain, who obviously has an unbelievable back story. (Goddard suffered a stroke during surgery to remove a brain aneurysm in 2021, and had to learn to walk again; and six months later she signed for the Bees to resume her football career). What she's brought to this team this season is that levelheadedness of being able to get in and amongst players, maintaining standards but also sharing her experiences and being inspirational. Players look at her – even I still look at her – and think from what you've been through to be out here and playing is amazing. It shows what mentality can do, if you have the right attitude. She's another example, especially for younger players coming in, to look at and see someone who's had a fantastic career, and if I apply myself, I could have something like that.

Do you have ambitions to manage higher up – Championship, WSL?

Having played in the WSL and international football, of course I'd like to manage at a higher level. But it's a journey. As a player I didn't at 18, 19 years of age say: I'm going to be number one at Chelsea or Manchester City. You're going to go through a process and earn your opportunities. I'm fully aware of that. At this moment in my career I'm still at the infancy of learning and identifying myself in terms

of the manager I want to be. So in the future it would be fantastic, but right now I'm content with the beginning of the journey.

You blazed a trail by playing for Braga in Portugal, and now your old Man City teammates Georgia Stanway, Lucy Bronze and Keira Walsh are all doing well abroad. How did this feel at the time, and will this become the norm, as with the men's game?

The opportunities within the game are so diverse now. In the French league the first and second division are going full-time, the Spanish league is full-time, so is the Portuguese league, the Italian league similar, so there are so many opportunities. For me personally, when I speak to players, if they have the opportunity to go and play abroad I always encourage them, not just from a football perspective, but from a life perspective. It's a fantastic experience to go and live and work in another country, learn a different culture, potentially learn a different language, and Braga's not a bad place to live to be fair!



You also played with Jill Scott – what do you think about her becoming an instant national treasure?

Jill is a fantastic character. What you see is what you get with Jill. She is 100% authentic, the most genuine person you could ever meet. I'm just so happy for her, she's someone who deserves every single bit of success that she's getting, because she's one of the most hard-working, honest players you could ever come across. How you see her on TV is exactly how she is. If she was sat here right now she'd be exactly the same. She'd run to the end of the earth for someone. When you see people like that doing well and getting success you're delighted for them.

Finally, should there be more women managers of women's teams?

I think it will definitely come. You're seeing more and more, especially ex-players going down that route who are doing their coaching badges. It's taking time, but I have no doubt in the next two or three years you'll see more female managers. And hopefully eventually creeping into the men's side too. At some point – it's going to take one – someone is going to take the jump and give someone an opportunity and they might surprise everyone.



Promotion and relegation changes



The FA Board has this week recommended changes to promotion and relegation between Tiers 2 and 3 of the Women's Football Pyramid. These changes are subject to ratification by FA Council.

In a significant shake-up of the existing structure which sees one team promoted and relegated, The FA will remove the requirement for the current end of season play-off to determine the side promoted to the Barclays Women's Championship, which takes place between the respective winners of the FA Women's National League Northern and Southern Premier Divisions.

Instead, both FA Women's National League Premier Division title winners will be rewarded for their success with promotion, with two clubs in turn being relegated from the Barclays Women's Championship.

The changes will come into

effect from the 2023/24 season.

The structural change will not impact the Barclays Women's Super League and the existing system for promotion and relegation to and from the Barclays Women's Championship.

The play-off fixture will still go ahead this season. Nottingham Forest, Burnley and Wolves are all battling it out to finish top in the Northern Division while Watford, Ipswich and Oxford United are all in contention in the Southern league.

Coventry United were relegated from the Championship this season while Sunderland are currently second from bottom.

The structural change will not impact the Women's Super League, which sees one team relegated and one team promoted from the Championship.

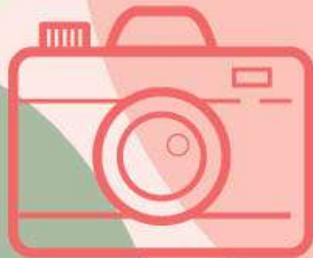
The news came just a week after Tottenham

chairman Daniel Levy said that he thought promotion and relegation should be scrapped in the Barclays Women's Super League.

Levy has expressed his support for the scrapping of promotion and relegation from the women's top-flight in a bid to encourage more clubs to invest in their women's teams.

The chairman's argument hinges on the idea that investment in players and infrastructure would increase if club hierarchies were not concerned by the threat of relegation.

Relegation and promotion have been part of the WSL fabric since 2014. After a dramatic promotion race in the Championship, Bristol City Women confirmed their return to the top-flight after their 4-0 victory over Charlton Athletic. The return ends a two-year existence outside the WSL.



Fan Fanatic

A SNAPSHOT OF FAN'S PHOTOS OF THE MONTH



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KEY DATES:

NOMINATIONS OPEN - 5 MAY 2023

NOMINATIONS CLOSE - 18 MAY 2023

Wiegman surprises grassroots girls team with a special coaching session at St. Georges



The Meerkats, an U12 girls' football team from Shrewsbury, Shropshire, were left thrilled after being treated to a special coaching session by none other than England Senior Women's Head Coach Sarina Wiegman, and Assistant Coach, Arjan Veurink, as part of Nationwide Building Society and England Football's Mutual Respect partnership.

The grassroots team had previously been awarded the Nationwide Mutual Respect Award for their contribution to the local community, after raising over £21,000 through various fundraising initiatives to

support the family of a player whose father was diagnosed with Stage 4 terminal cancer.

As a special thank you for all their hard work, the Meerkats were treated to a personal training session delivered by Wiegman. The girls also got the chance to sit down with Sarina and ask her about her own personal experiences in football and her inspirations. The Mutual Respect partnership has placed specific emphasis on promoting women and girls' football in the UK, aiming to break down barriers and provide a safe and encouraging place to play grass-

roots football for everyone. A place where they can be inspired and share a sense of community.

Sarina Wiegman spoke about the partnership and meeting the girls: It's been a fantastic day celebrating the Nationwide Building Society and the England Football mutual respect partnership. The girls have had lots of fun which was the key thing. It's an amazing thing what they have done, coming together as a community and fundraising such a large amount to help one of the team's family.

She went on to talk about the

importance of grassroots football and the role it has within communities: "Grassroots football is very important for local communities in England because it connects people and brings people together, so it's a social thing too. It's about moving, learning about themselves, learning about others, winning, losing. It's about having fun and experiencing the joy that playing football brings. Not just on the pitch, but outside of it too. It's great to see what Nationwide have done in their partnership with England Football to promote and protect this important community.

On the subject of female role models in society Wiegman said: "It's very important for young girls to have role models, because that's what we always say. What you see it, you can be it, and that's really inspirational. We want every girl to have access to football when they see players like Millie Bright and Leah Williamson play they think, 'I can play too'.

Speaking further about Nationwide's partnership she said: We saw that after the Euros and now it had a big impact on young girls, and boys and adults, but what we want is for little girls to get inspired and want to play football, or any sport and partnerships like this help make that happen.

Merridy James, Meerkats Under 12's Coach spoke about the special surprise and the involvement in the campaign: "We are hugely thankful to Nationwide Building Society and England Football for inviting us to St George's Park and giving our girls this opportunity. It has been one of those moments that the girls will be talking about forever. It is not every day you get to be coached by two incredibly successful coaches in Sarina and Arjan. To meet them is such a unique opportunity but to be coached by them is just a thing of dreams!

Sarina and the Lionesses are huge role models to the girls and inspire them on a daily basis. The success of the Lionesses over the last few years has been incredible for football. Not only has it encouraged and inspired girls and women to get involved in the game but it has also broken down barriers and stereotypes where the nation now know that girls and women can play football, and given lots of girls like ours some amazing positive female role models to look up to.

It's really great what Nationwide and England Football have done with this partnership, we were honoured to win our mutual respect award which celebrated the amazing community within the Meerkats and the wonderful fundraising efforts of the girls.

Football is one big community, it gives you the opportunity to meet people and connect with others. It's a common thread that ties you together when you may not have anything else in common.

It's especially important now in a cost-of-living crisis to have that escape where you can have fun and see your friends. Hopefully many more people can be inspired by our story and what the girls achieved as a community and can pick up a ball and have a kick about together, and maybe make a little difference themselves."

As part of this partnership, Nationwide Building Society has awarded 26 clubs with its Mutual Respect Award to celebrate their services to grassroots football and honour the impact they have on their local communities, including individuals like Simon Mahomed, for his exceptional inclusive work through the power of football in his community as a referee and LGBTQ+ campaigner, and Lucas Capalbo, who undertook remarkable work during the pandemic, assisting the mental health of 300 young people.

Others, such as Stacey Savage, who has helped improved behaviour towards referees in the Merseyside Youth Football League.

In addition, grants have been awarded to give clubs a vital lifeline, particularly in the cost-of-living crisis. Nationwide Building Society has given out over £100,000 in grants to more than 100 grassroots clubs up and down the country, which has had a positive impact on thousands of grassroots players.

Paul Hibbs, Head of Advertising at Nationwide Building Society, commented: "The importance of female role models for young developing athletes cannot be overstated, and the Meerkats were thrilled to have the opportunity to learn from such an inspirational woman and role model, Sarina Wiegman. "Partnerships like this are vital in the world of grassroots football as they help to build a legacy of inclusion, tolerance, and mutual respect within communities. Football has the power to bring people together and create positive change, which is especially important during hard times like the current cost-of-living crisis. Through this partnership, we have been able to recognise the outstanding work done by grassroots clubs and volunteers up and down the country, while promoting women's and girls' football and assist in moving it forward."

The partnership between Nationwide Building Society and

England Football has seen a number of legacy campaigns as well, first in 2021 with the launch of the Coin for Respect campaign, which saw the creation of the first ever official referees coin to start every grassroots match across the country.

In 2022, Nationwide Building Society and England Football acknowledged the importance of female role models within society and specifically within grassroots football. In the build-up to the Euros in 2022 they launched the Where Greatness is Made campaign, championing some of the prominent England women's captains, from the first official captain Sheila Parker back in 1972 up to Steph Houghton. Plaques were installed at the captains' grassroots clubs up and down the country to recognise the incredible

achievements of these women and special films were made to tell their inspirational stories and to highlight the impact they have had on women's football. In honour of the Euros victory, Nationwide Building Society and England Football also installed gold plaques in the hometowns of each of the winning squad as a constant reminder of their achievements and to serve as inspiration for future generations.

For more information on Nationwide Building Society's Mutual Respect partnerships with the UK's home nations as it aims to build mutual respect within grassroots football, making society more tolerant and inclusive, visit:

<https://www.nationwide.co.uk/about-us/mutual-respect/>



GRASSROOTS GOSSIP

ALL THE LATEST NEWS FROM WOMEN'S GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL

Women's football star inspires Welwyn Garden City children

A women's football star inspired children at a school in Welwyn Garden City after paying them a surprise visit. Lily Woodham, who plays as a defender for Women's Super League side Reading and for the Welsh national team, went to Springmead Primary School and put on a number of football-based activities, before speaking to the children about her career.

Young Ewe Rams go unbeaten in Title winning season

Derby County Women Under 20s finished the FA WNL Reserve Midlands Division campaign unbeaten after a hard-fought 1-0 victory over Lincoln City at Moorlands Sports Ground on Sunday. Dan Dobrzycki's young Ewe Rams wrapped up the league title with a win over Sporting Khalsa in their last game

Cadbury Ireland urges people to support women's football

The Public House have launched a new campaign for Cadbury urging the public to show their support for women's football across Ireland. To date, the brand has made inroads to make women's football more accessible, removing some of the barriers to entry and improving the state of play for grassroots' women's clubs.

Holbeck Moor FC honoured with prestigious award

Holbeck Moor have become the first-ever women's team in Britain to be given the Football Club of Sanctuary award. The club offers free football sessions, supports players with donated kit, reimburse bus fares and a creche at women's training.

Howdens launch gamechanger programme



Howdens Kitchens has today launched a £3m partnership with The FA through England Football to improve clubhouse facilities across grassroots football clubs up and down the country.

Howdens' Game Changer Programme in partnership with England Football will see the kitchen company aim to fund £3m worth of kitchens over three years for England Football Accredited grassroots clubs. Eligible grassroots clubs can apply here to download application forms: www.howdens.com/Home/help-and-advice/about-us/Charities/game-changer

Andrew Livingston, Chief Executive Officer, Howdens, said: "There is quite rightly a lot of attention on grassroots football and what happens on the pitch. We feel that the off-pitch facilities are very important too, because clubhouses are the hub of the community, they're the place for teas and coffees for the taxi of mum and dad, where the

frozen wet feet of the army of volunteers dry off, and when the post-match discussion starts.

"If kitchens are the heart of our homes, then kitchens should be the heart of community grassroots football too," said Livingston.

James Kendall, Director of Football Development at The FA, said: "We have around 18,000 grassroots football clubs across the country and they are the cornerstone of our national game. A key part of our grassroots strategy is our commitment to strengthen every aspect of local clubs, particularly facilities which play such a crucial role in providing the right environment to play and gather.

"We're really delighted to be working in partnership with Howdens on this unique Game Changer programme. By providing new kitchens at clubs which are most in need, we aim to help them grow and thrive

and continue to make a positive impact on the lives of their players, volunteers, supporters, and the wider community."

To help launch the programme, football legends Jill Scott, MBE and Chris Kamara, MBE lent their support, driving home the importance of grassroots football and clubhouse facilities on their own careers.

Jill said: "I have so many fond memories both on and off the pitch.

"Over the years I've visited hundreds of clubhouses and it's fair to say the kitchen facilities have certainly varied.

"From a tiny counter at Boldon Girls (my first club) where I used to spend 20p on a bag of mixed sweets after the game, to a bar serving hot food (including my favourite post-match treat - pizza!) at Marine FC, where we played our Everton matches.

"The kitchen is the hub of the club, bringing together players, supporters and the wider community and that's why I'm so pleased to be involved with the Howdens Game Changer programme, where grassroots clubs all over the country are set to benefit."

Kammy added: "When I started out, clubhouse facilities were pretty basic!

"I went to many a tournament with just a bag of crisps and some water to keep me going, hoping that the manager would remember to bring the fruit for our half time snack. And, if we won, we'd often stop off at the chippie on the way home!

"Thankfully, we've come a long way since then, but many clubhouses still need help to improve much-needed facilities.

"So, the new kitchens from Howdens will make a real difference to grassroots clubs and bringing local communities together."

Howdens will work with The FA to support and fund the kitchens, and together they will help connect eligible clubs with local tradespeople, for the fit, via its 800 depots across the country.





CUP COMPETITIONS



Arsenal dazzle in front of record-breaking crowd despite heartbreaking Champions League exit

By Rosie Hall from The Emirates Stadium

As soon as you leave the station at Finsbury Park, you get the feeling that this game is going to be different.

It's still three hours until kick off, but there are already people walking around chanting "RED ARMY" and "ARSENAL. ARSENAL."

You could easily be forgiven for thinking it is a Saturday at 3pm. That the crowds gathering are there for the men in the Premier League. But look a little closer, and you see that the names on the backs of the red and white shirts aren't Ødegaard, Saka, or Martinelli. They're Mead, Williamson, Meidema.

Of course - all three players were absent for the game due to the many ACL injuries within the current Arsenal Women squad.

But that didn't stop the Gunners putting on a dazzling display against the German giants of Women's football.

How it happened

Arsenal Women are not strangers to playing at the Emirates. They aren't even strangers to playing at the Emirates in front of record crowds. But this time round, they have done something that has never been done in their history. They have sold out the Emirates Stadium. Playing in front of a crowd of over 60,000 people.

With Little and Williamson both out injured, the North London side were captained by the fantastic Katie McCabe. They set the bar high after just 11 minutes. With a cool, calm and collected finish from Swedish superstar Stina Blackstenius. The first Arsenal WUCL goal in front of a sold out crowd. The Emirates erupted with a roar.

The Gunners continued to dominate throughout the first half. With impressive performances up and down the pitch. They were defending well at the back, while also creating chances at the front. But their dominance took a hit just minutes before the half time

whistle. With former Arsenal star Jill Roord tucking an equaliser past Manuela Zinsberger.

With a near-perfect start to the second half, Blackstenius hit the back of the net once again before it was ruled out by VAR. Something that was not taken too well by a now anxious Emirates crowd. Wolfsburg took the lead in the 58th minute thanks to a powerful header from Alexander Popp. Who is, arguably, one of the best players in the women's game.

Arsenal's injury problem went from bad to worse when yet another player fell to the grass. Laura Wienroither, who was later confirmed to have an ACL injury, was in visible agony. Taken off on a stretcher. A sight that is becoming a little too familiar for Arsenal fans.

"When she went down, I knew it would be an ACL," says Eve, who only started watching Arsenal Women when they were given games at The Emirates. "I'm frustrated. Why have there been so many this season?"

Are Arsenal doing something different to other clubs?"

This is a feeling felt by so many at the moment. The devastating Weinrother injury takes the first team injury tally to six. With 4 ACL injuries and 2 hamstring injuries.

"The sight of the stretcher coming on to help Laura Weinrother off the pitch only 20 minutes after she herself had come on as sub made me think the injury gods are really not on Arsenal's side right now," says Jon, who has been attending Arsenal Women games since the last (and only) time they won the Champions League. "The loss of our talented triumvirate this season has already beggared belief. It's like The Invincibles losing Henry, Bergkamp and Vieira all at once."

A 75th minute equaliser from Jen Beattie filled The Emirates with hope once again, with the goal forcing the already nerve-wracking tie into extra time.

Extra time was filled with some lovely football from both sides and a truly passionate display from the Gunners. The depleting energy levels and lack of squad depth perhaps showing for the Arsenal side in the last 15 minutes.

With a penalty shoot-out feeling within touching distance, a last minute mistake from Wubben-Moy led to Wolfsburg's Bremer slotting another past Zinsberger.

Hearts broke around the ground. But no one's more than that of Lotte Wubben-Moy who had, up until then, been one of the standout players of the evening.

As soon as that goal hit the back of the net, there was a palpable sense that the tie was over. With just a minute of extra time left to play.

The Gunners were out. But what they had started was enormous. Hopefully setting a precedent for every season to come.

"As someone who has been to many of the men's Arsenal football games in my time, the atmosphere at the women's game felt exactly the same," says Sasha, a lifelong Arsenal fan. "A sold out crowd all feeling

the highs and lows of live football. A real sense of unity throughout the stadium."

While they may have fallen short of a space in the Champions League final this time round, the success of the evening should not be understated. The Gunners had the 60,000-strong crowd in the palm of their hands.

It leaves us with a question that is growing in interest: should The Emirates be the official stadium for both the men's and women's teams at Arsenal?

Perhaps we're a few seasons off that. But one thing is certain. That won't be the last time we see the Arsenal Women break records at The Emirates.

Winners of the tie Wolfsburg progress to the Women's Champions League final, where they take on the formidable Barcelona Femini. It is set to take place on Saturday June 3rd at the PSV Stadium, in Eindhoven.



Experiencing Barcelona Femeni on a European Night

Words: Jamie Davies

TWFM's Jamie Davies travelled to the famous Camp Nou last month as he went to experience a Women's Champions League atmosphere like no other.

At the beginning of the week, I had travelled to Milan in Italy to go for a tour around the scintillating San Siro Stadium in case the rumours are true that this great sporting venue is to be taken down in the near future. After asking the tour guide, who was an AC Milan supporter, he is praying it stays around for an eternity.

A couple of days later and I find myself inside the San Siro again this time with Inter Milan hosting Juventus in a Coppa Italia (Italian Cup) semi-final second leg as the winner would go onto make a bid on becoming cup winners of Italy. Just the one goal in the 90 minutes coming from the hosts settled the tie at 2-1 on aggregate for Inter.



Fast forward less than eight hours later and there I am on a Ryanair to Barcelona as I decided to make a detour before heading back home in the United Kingdom.

I landed in Spain around 9am local time with Barcelona Femeni's Champions League meeting with Chelsea was not until 6:45pm which meant plenty of time to kill. Once the bags were dropped off at the hotel, it was time to do a bit of tourism despite hardly any sleep the night before. With temperatures over 20 degrees, that was more than enough to convince myself to change my jeans to a pair of shorts.

After a bit of food and drink along with a good nap needed, it was off to Camp Nou for the match! Jumped on the nearby metro and already I could see a majority of girls on the same coach wearing FC Barcelona shirts who were clearly making their way to the big game.

Before arranging this trip, I was expecting tens of thousands will be attending this semi-final tie as the women's team of Barcelona have been nearly selling out Camp Nou over the last 12 to 15 months whenever they are at home in the Champions League.

In April 2022, Barcelona achieved a record attendance of 91,600 fans when they beat VfL Wolfsburg in the Champions League semi-finals. Weeks before that fixture, Barcelona had similar numbers this time it was 91,553 when they overcame their arch rivals Real Madrid.

In the clash with Wolfsburg, the noise and atmosphere from Barca's supporters was clearly a game changer as they comfortably beat the 2-time European champions 5-1 on the night. Camp Nou has become a fortress for the Barcelona Femeni and with the chance of visiting one of the best stadiums in the world, it was an

opportunity not to be missed.

Originally, I tried to buy an online ticket from the official Barcelona club website but once I reached the stages of payment, the website declined me from having a ticket. In my ticket details section I confirmed that I was from the United Kingdom and that is what triggered it as the club have restrictions of allowing fans from the country of the visiting team due to safety reasons.

I nearly gave up on making the trip to Spain until I read that Chelsea were given a small allocation for their fans to attend. Only 150 seats were given to the blues but despite the low numbers, I was able to grab a ticket in the general sale. Okay I'm not a Chelsea fan but I had to visit this place! When the metro arrived into Maria Cristina, there was still plenty of time until the gates were to open (they were not opening until 90 minutes before the kick-off). I bumped into a group of Chelsea fans right outside the entrance gates who looked confident that Emma Hayes' side can turn the aggregate score (Barca 1-0) around.

The gates had opened and away we go as it was a good five-minute walk to Camp Nou but what was great to see was a player like Alex

Putellas alongside the male footballers of Robert Lewandowski and Gavi. Once in my seat, along with Chelsea's fans, we were allocated in category 1 in the lower tier just a few rows away from the team dugouts.

The stadium was just as breathtaking as what it looks on television and Google images as the sun was setting down for the evening. Chelsea's Fran Kirby, in her Chelsea jacket and tracksuit, was on her phone while standing in the dugout area and you could already tell that the midfielder doesn't look fit and ready. Days later after the game, Kirby announced she would be missing this summer's Women's World in Australia and New Zealand. She may not have been at her fitness best but she still gave us a wave.

More Chelsea fans came in and found their seats as some were literally here for a quick 24 hour trip. The game got underway and there were still some patches of empty seats across the venue but it was most likely locals would drop by and buy a reasonably priced ticket to experience the game.

How were Chelsea going to find a goal while also keeping the likes of Asisat Oshoala and Caroline Graham Hansen out of their penalty area for 90 minutes? The first half, as probably expected, was dominated by the

2021 Champions League winners as the songs sung and the reactive noise by the home crowd was a mighty challenge for the Chelsea players to try and get out of their head and to remain focus on the job in hand.

At the halfway point, the visitors kept it at 0-0 but still needed a goal to at least stay in the tie. I said to Chelsea supporters sitting next to me that they are still in it and anything can happen in the next 45 minutes.

Hayes made no changes at the break but they started to improve in the 2nd half with Guro Reiten and Sam Kerr getting more of the ball and pressing forward.

One player that was a highlight to watch was Oshoala up front for Barca. Not only is she dangerous and fast but the way she can hold and protect the ball is something else - first time I had ever seen the Nigerian forward in the flesh.

Despite Chelsea's efforts, Graham Hansen had squeezed in the first goal of the game which looked to be the tie killer after 63 minutes.

The goal was one thing but the little patch of away supporters made more and more noise as they were not accepting defeat. Their spirits were picked up on the pitch in build-up to a Chelsea

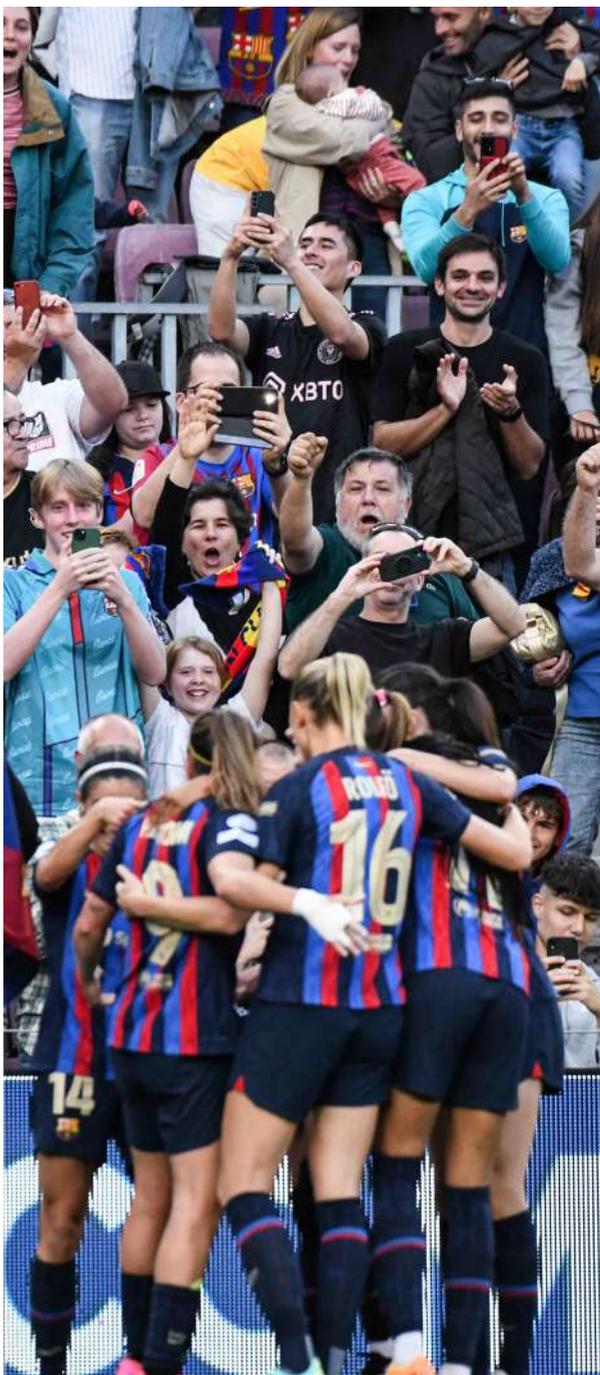
equalizer that was tapped in off a rebound from Reiten, the blues supporters went nuts in front of a stadium that had over 72,000 supporters. It was a cool experience to see a massive cauldron stadium like Camp Nou go quiet.

It would prove to be the only goal from the WSL champions as they failed in adding to Reiten's contribution. When the clock got closer to the 90, Camp Nou was getting louder and louder as the home supporters were growing in confidence that they were heading to a third straight Champions League final in a row.

Chelsea had thrown everything out there but it just wasn't their night. In total, 72,262 made it to Camp Nou - it may not have been the numbers from last season but what an atmosphere it was to experience.

Before the evening was done, Putellas joined her team mates to sing and clap to the fans for attending and what a following they will be bringing to Eindhoven in June's Champions League final.

Barcelona Femeni are going to be some team to beat.



FA Cup Preview: Chelsea vs Manchester United



By Paul Donegan

The 2023 Women's FA Cup final between Chelsea and Manchester United takes place at Wembley Stadium on Sunday 14th May (kick off 2:30pm BST). Chelsea have won the last two FA Cups and will be looking to win it for the fifth time in total. This will be Manchester United's first appearance in the final. These sides are currently the top two in the Women's Super League (WSL). The match has sold-out and will set a new attendance record for the final and cup.

How they got to the final

Both sides entered the cup in the fourth round. In that round, Chelsea beat Liverpool 3-2 at Kingsmeadow with Sam Kerr scoring a hat-trick. The Blues took on London rivals Arsenal

in the fourth round. They won that match 2-0 with Sophie Ingle and Kerr scoring the goals. In the quarter-finals, Chelsea overcame Reading, beating them 3-1. The goals were scored by Jess Carter, Maren Mjelde and Guro Reiten. Kerr scored the only goal in the semi-final as they beat Aston Villa 1-0 to reach their third consecutive final.

Manchester United started their FA Cup campaign with a 2-1 win away at Sunderland with Nikita Parris scoring both goals. In the fourth round, they beat Durham 5-0. Vilde Boe Risa, Leah Galton, Hannah Blundell, Alessia Russo and Parris scored the goals. They travelled to The Dripping Pan in the quarter-finals where they beat Lewes 3-1. The goals were scored

by Russo, Boe Risa and Parris. Galton, Hannah Blundell, Alessia Russo and Parris scored the goals. They travelled to The Dripping Pan in the quarter-finals where they beat Lewes 3-1. The goals were scored by Russo, Boe Risa and Parris. Galton, Russo and Rachel Williams scored as they reached Wembley for the first time by beating Brighton 3-2 in the semi-finals.

Past Meetings

In the WSL meetings this season, Chelsea won the meeting at Leigh Sports Village in November 3-1. Kerr, Lauren James, and Erin Cuthbert scored for the Blues whilst Russo scored United's consolation goal. In the return fixture at Kingsmeadow in March, Chelsea won 1-0. Kerr scored the only goal of

the game during the first half.

Chelsea

Chelsea are currently second in the WSL. Emma Hayes normally lines them up in a 4-2-3-1 formation but has also recently also used a 3-4-1-2 formation, even swapping between them during matches.

Starting in goal will either be Ann-Katrin Berger or Zecira Musovic. In defence, Eve Perisset, captain Magdalena Eriksson, Kadeisha Buchanan, Jess Carter, Maren Mjelde and Niamh Charles have been regular starters throughout the season. Alsu Abdullina could be a substitute whilst Millie Bright will probably miss the final with a knee injury.

Erin Cuthbert, Sophie Ingle, Melanie Leupolz, Jessie Fleming and Jelena Cankovic could be used in the midfield. In the wide attacking midfield positions, Lauren James, Guro Reiten and Johanna Rytting Kaneryd have been used.

In the number 10 role, Fran Kirby is out injured for the rest of the season so Pernille Harder, Fleming or Cankovic could start there.

Sam Kerr will probably start up front with Harder, James and Reiten as a back-up in this position.

Manchester United

Marc Skinner's side currently sit top of the WSL. He normally sets United up in a 4-2-3-1 formation, and has kept a fairly settled starting line-up throughout the season. Mary Earps will probably start in goal with Sophie Baggaley as back-up.

In defence, Ona Batlle normally starts as right-back, Maya Le Tissier and Millie Turner in the centre, and Hannah Blundell on the left side. Aoife Mannion has started some recent games as a centre-back.

Other defensive options include Jayde Riviere, Aissatou Tounkara and Estelle Cascarino. Maria Thorisdottir is out injured for the rest of the season.

Captain Katie Zelem and Hayley Ladd have been regular starters in midfield, with Nikita Parris, Ella Toone and Leah Galton playing in more attacking roles. Other players who can play in

midfield include Vilde Boe Risa, Lisa Naalsund and Lucia Garcia. Alessia Russo is the normal starter in forward position with Rachel Williams and Martha Thomas as other options in attacking positions.

Match Officials

The referee for the final is Emily Heaslip and she will be assisted by Georgia Ball and Chloe-Ann Small. The fourth official will be Abigail Byrne and the reserve assistant referee is Sophie Dennington. For the first time in a Women's FA Cup final, VAR will be used. Michael Salisbury and Sian Massey-Ellis will be the officials in charge of that.

TV/Radio coverage

In the UK, the final will be shown live on BBC One/Sport Website/iPlayer with coverage starting at 1:50pm (BST). There is live radio commentary on BBC Radio 5 Sports Extra (coverage starting at 2:15pm (BST)) and coverage on talkSport from 2pm (BST).





HOME NATIONS

Stellar Stanway

By Clare McEwen



Georgia Stanway needs no introduction. A fierce attacking midfielder, Georgia's a player you want to see on the ball. Her winner in extra time against Spain was a screamer, and she is the coolest penalty taker.

Born in Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria in January 1999, her battling strength probably stems from having three brothers and training with them from the age of about four. She used to collect the balls for the u7s whilst they trained, and then her mum asked if she could join in. It didn't take her long to settle, and she played for Furness Rovers from age 6 until u11s. She joined Dalton Girls next, having to move on from the boys' team.

Her ability was soon spotted, and she joined Blackburn Rovers' academy aged 13. Quickly making her way through the youth system, was soon in the senior squad. She scored 35 goals in 15 games for Blackburn in the Women's Premier League, before joining Manchester City in July 2015 - aged just 16! Stanway made her senior debut

for City in a Continental Cup game against Durham, coming on as a substitute in a 5-0 win. A few weeks later - August 2015 - Georgia came off the bench against Everton to score her first goal for her new club. Another came against Bristol Academy, helping her earn the club's Rising Star award.

In 2016, still only 17-years-old, Georgia scored one of her now trademark screamers. The 30-yard strike rocketed into the top corner against Liverpool in an FA Cup match - it won Nissan Goal of the Season. She finished the season with six goals and was nominated for Young Sports Personality of the Year.

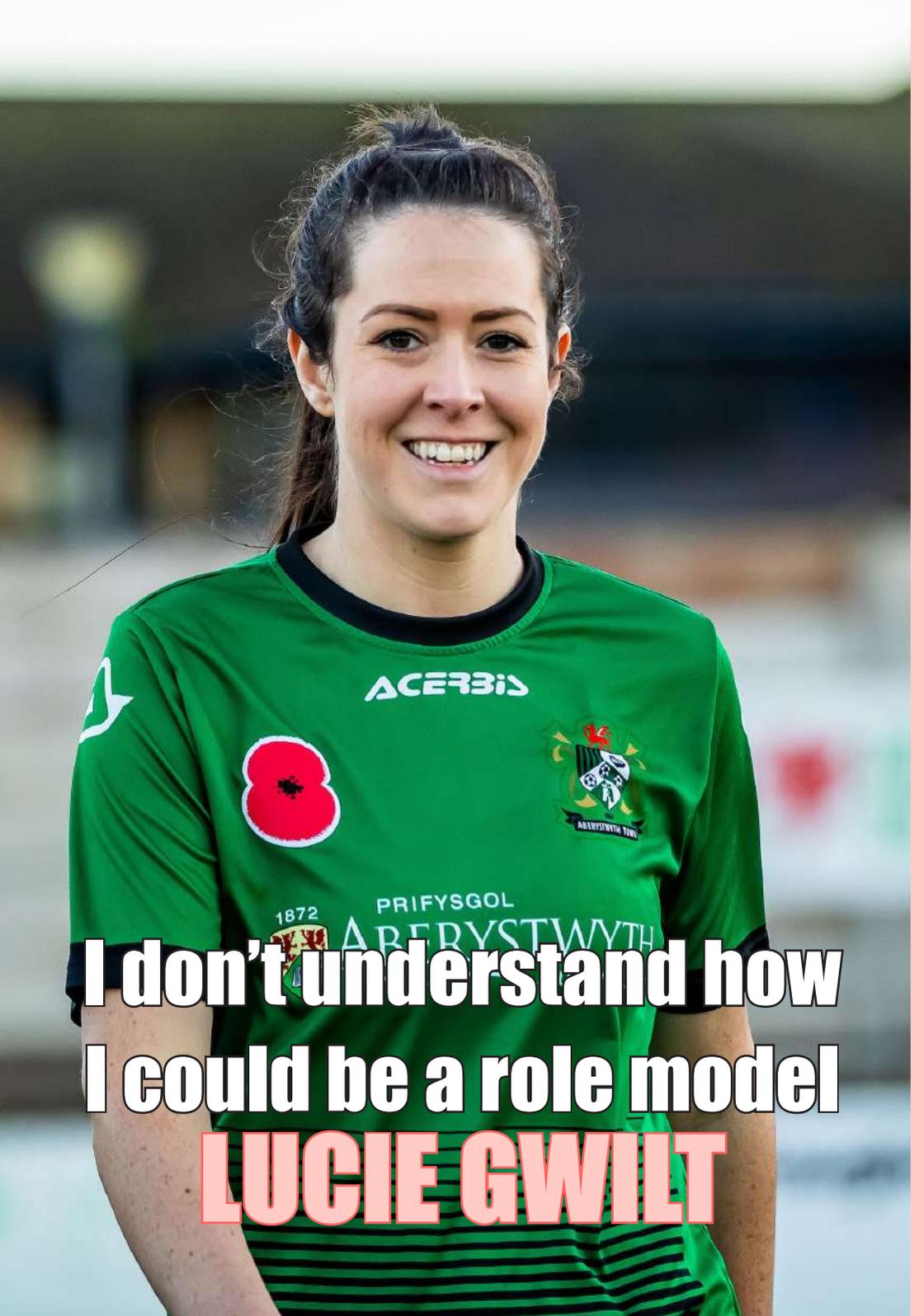
During 2017/18 her performances led to her being named in the UEFA Women's Champions League Team of the Season and she won PFA Young Player of the Year. She left City at the end of the 2021/22 season. During her time there she made 186 appearances, scored 67 goals (becoming City's all-time leading goalscorer) and won 7 domestic trophies: one WSL, three FA

Cups and three League Cups.

She joined Bayern Munich for the 2022/23 season, making her debut in August 2022 against Barcelona; scoring her first two goals against Benfica in a Champions League match in October.

For England, Georgia was selected for the u15s schoolgirls' squad who won the Bob Docherty Cup in 2014. Moving swiftly through the ranks, she captained the u17s to a bronze medal in their 2016 Euros before captaining them again in their World Cup: England reached the quarter-finals and Georgia was the Young Lionesses' top scorer with three goals in four games.

In a whirlwind 2018, she captained the u19s to third place in their Euros; played for the u20s in their World Cup (scoring six for the third placed England); and got her senior call-up (scoring on her debut). She was the youngest outfield player in England's 2019 World Cup squad. And with the 2023 World Cup beckoning, we all know what she's capable of...



**I don't understand how
I could be a role model**

LUCIE GWILT



Pictures: Lucie Gwilt/FAW

Lucie Gwilt has been described as the hardest working woman in Welsh football: for good reason! Aberystwyth Town Women's defender takes on most of the behind-the-scenes admin for the Welsh premier league club; she organises and coaches at girls' summer camps; works full-time for Aberystwyth University, and is mum to a four-year-old girl.

Lucie spoke to Clare McEwen about what the club has to offer young players, how they're building for the future, and how the game in Wales can keep improving.

Talk me through your footballing history?

It's not a very long one! I played in school and for a ladies' team up to around age 15/16. Went to

uni and I stopped playing. I went to uni in Aberystwyth and ended up staying there. When I realised all my uni friends had left, I was thinking of ways to make new friends in the area. My partner at the time introduced me to Penryncoch Football Club when I was about 25 and I haven't looked back since. I played for them for three years and then moved to Aberystwyth Town. Been with them the last four [years].

You've been described as the hardest working woman in Welsh football, how much do you do behind the scenes for Aber Town?

I do most of the admin work for the club. The club consists of women's first team, women's development team and u19s team. Then we have the girls' development centre which has 10s, 12s, 14s and 16s; we run girls camps too. So, whilst there's managers of each section, I do most of

the admin. I do all the tier one licensing - getting all the criteria and evidence sorted. I sit on the committee as well, but we've started a women's committee and so areas of work are starting to be distributed among other people. Carrie [Dunn - Media and Communications with Aber Women] has come on board to help with the media and she's been a massive help. Yeah, it's quite a lot with a full-time job and I've got a four-year-old daughter.

Are you noticing more girls coming to watch your games?

Oh, massively this season. We've started girls' teams and camps in the last two years. By creating that offering of girls' football, it's raising awareness of the women's team and that girls have got role models to look up to locally. They're coming to these camps from age four up, and quite often every Sunday we're

seeing new faces like the little girls we're coaching at these camps. A lot of the coaches are first team and development team players, which really helps because they see, oh they were coaching us at the camp. We've had loads of mascots come into games as well recently, all our home games. Again, they'll come to that game as a mascot, then they'll come to the next game as a supporter. Our spectator numbers, especially these younger girls, have grown a huge amount this season.

How does it feel to inspire these young girls, to give them a role model?

I get quite emotional about it when I see the girls, especially the ones that we coach and the development centre. I laugh because I don't understand how I could be a role model. I know I play in the Welsh premier league but there's so many players that are better than me, somehow, I still seem to be making first team football, so it confuses me in one way. Maybe I'm too modest to really enjoy it but looking at it from the benefit of what they're gaining, that's where I get quite emotional. Having a daughter, myself, knowing that she's got the role models around her too. It's when they come up to you in training or doing a coaching session, I'll never forget the first time it happened,

one of the girls says oh you play for Aber Women? I came to watch you on Sunday and they're all shy and yeah, that was really nice.

Aber Town seem proactive regarding school holiday camps, etc. Is this more common now or is Aber Town different?

I'm not aware of any that do the camps like us. We've mainly done that as a way to try and become more financially sustainable, but also sustainability in terms of players. It's a way for us to advertise ourselves, to highlight to the girls coming into the camps to say, right, you've played today would you be interested in joining the development centre. Because we're an hour and a half away from anywhere, it's really difficult to attract players - there is always going to be a club closer. We're reliant on local talent. Hopefully, we can rely on our own players coming through. I think it will become more common as clubs start to catch on to how beneficial it is. The expectation is now that there should be a girls' team in their local area.

It is wonderful watching the game grow. Do you ever feel slightly jealous that didn't happen earlier in your career?

The main reason I left was because my club folded and there was nothing else locally. Then it just seemed like '16 was

the natural drop off for girls. I just stopped (along) with all my friends. That is really common, isn't it? That's where a lot of girls stop playing. It'd be more of an obvious choice [now], I probably wouldn't have quit. I could be in a very different position because I'd have carried on playing for the last 15 years. Definitely not jealous, I really like to see the development, and I'm really excited about how things are going to get better. So no, definitely not jealous, just really excited for what's happening. Because I've got that little girl at home, I'm really excited to see what the future brings for her - there's going to be so many opportunities. So that's what I'm excited for.

Attracting young players like Elen Valentine to the club shows there are alternatives to English academies. Is that something Aber would like to try and encourage more?

Oh, yes, that is absolutely the way we're going now. That's really important for us in the way of recruiting and this new scholarship scheme. So, we got Elen on it (the scholarship scheme) and the big pull for her was senior game time. And senior level because playing senior football to playing youth football is so different - you're playing against horrible people like me on the pitch a lot of the time.

Just because you're faster than me, doesn't mean you're gonna get past me [laughs]. It's a lot more physical. I think that's the attraction we can give - come and play football in the top tier of Welsh football - senior game time. If they're playing at that standard, they'll be guaranteed full games with us, they won't be sitting on a bench, they'll be getting experience playing in a really good league. There's loads of opportunities to play: our u19s teams, our senior team, in our development team. With the scholarship system, they can play BUCS [British Universities & Colleges Sport] too for the university, all whilst doing a degree. They get I think £4500 a year, which is one of the best ones [scholarships] I think in Wales, so I'm hopeful that is going to be able to attract people to Aberystwyth because whilst it's difficult to attract them to travel to us, if they're studying here, obviously, they're living here.

Do you think more teams should try to bring players in from outside of Wales and what do you think the implications for Welsh football could be? I think it's only going to improve the league. Just like we've got Welsh players in the English system, it'd be nice if we're attracting English players from over the border. The league is only going to get better, and the

more competitive the league is, the easier it'll be to attract players: clubs will benefit overall. I think the biggest thing now is trying to retain Welsh players as well, though. In the Welsh league, if they are a certain standard, they are pushed to the English academies. It's really difficult trying to get 16-year-old girls to come play for us when they're getting offers from Man United. It's the badge, isn't it? It's so exciting. I'm gonna play for Man United u21s. They may never get a sniff of first team football. I think that's a really big one, trying to be in the position to be able to attract players: so you can go and play for Liverpool u21s, or you can go and play for Aston Villa, but you could come and play in this league. The more players we are attracting from all around the UK and beyond, the better it's going to be.

Wales nearly qualified for the World Cup, equal pay at international level, change is happening. But there's still a gulf between the Welsh premier league and the WSL, what needs to be done to help narrow that gap? It's got to be money, hasn't it? We're getting a lot of funding from the FAW [Football Association Wales] but I think clubs are going to have to be a little more savvy in trying to generate more income. Not just like we're doing with money from camps, here

and there, we've got to really be looking at sponsorship, it's trying to really generate proper income. We want to be in a position where we can be offering professional contracts to players, we need to be able to pay players and entice the best players here. So yeah, money does talk at the end of the day. I think if clubs in the Adran premier are supported, if the FAW are able to find more funding to be able to look at those sorts of avenues to be able to pay the best players or help us find our own ways of generating that sort of income, to be able to be sustainable for full time contracts, that is the difference. We can only do so much; there's only so much you can pay players - we certainly wouldn't be able to afford to play every player in the team.



Who will be heading to Australia this summer?

By **Jamie Davies**

The FIFA Women's World Cup is just around the corner with so little time left for outsiders to convince Sarina Wiegman that they should be on the plane to Australia this summer.

As we write this article, there is just weeks remaining of the Women's Super League season and many of the other European leagues followed by the final of the Women's Champions League (taking place on June 3rd).

In around four to six weeks' time, we will be learning most of the 32 squads expected to be landing in Australia and New Zealand. This of course includes Lionesses manager of Sarina Wiegman to have concluded who has made her 23 player's squad.

Wiegman had called for an extension that all competing



teams could take 26 players to the World Cup just like what was done at the men's World Cup in Qatar. However back in December, FIFA rejected the extension requests and will instead go with no more than 23 players.

The last couple of years have seen England strive forward with only one defeat in 31 matches under Wiegman since she became the national team boss in 2021. Because of this we have seen the England squad look strong in all departments of the field from the defenders to the leading line of forwards.

This process has become a bit of a headache for Wiegman when it comes to squad selection which makes her job tough to reject players who also deserve to wear three lions on their shirt. But only 23 can board the plane in July and with the sad news

of Leah Williamson and Fran Kirby a definite miss for the tournament, there are opportunity bells ringing for outsiders. Below is the most recent squad from last month's action in the Finalissima win over Brazil followed by a friendly defeat to the Matildas.

Recent Lionesses Squad
Goalkeepers: Mary Earps (Manchester United), Hannah Hampton (Aston Villa) Sandy MacIver (Manchester City), Ellie Roebuck (Manchester City)

Defenders: Lucy Bronze (Barcelona), Jess Carter (Chelsea), Niamh Charles (Chelsea), Alex Greenwood (Manchester City), Maya Le Tissier (Manchester United), Esme Morgan (Manchester City), Lucy Parker (West Ham United), Leah Williamson (Arsenal), Lotte Wubben-Moy (Arsenal)*

Midfielders: Laura Coombs (Manchester City), Jordan Nobbs (Aston Villa), Jessica Park (Everton, loan from Manchester City), Georgia Stanway (Bayern Munich), Ella Toone (Manchester United), Keira Walsh (Barcelona)

Forwards: Rachel Daly (Aston Villa), Lauren Hemp (Manchester City), Lauren James (Chelsea), Chloe Kelly (Manchester City), Katie Robinson (Brighton & Hove Albion), Alessia Russo (Manchester United)

Now how many of the mentioned players in the recent squad selection make it to the World Cup? We obviously don't know the answer to that as only Wiegman and her coaching staff will know who will at least be considered or may even be selected without us knowing. But which players are fighting for a spot that may just have a chance of representing their country this summer? Here are some possibilities...

Lotte Wubben-Moy

Age: 24

Club: Arsenal

Position: Defender

This may seem an obvious choice but hear us out. Lotte Wubben-Moy has always been a bench player while Wiegman has been in charge but with Williamson and possibly Millie Bright

- this is the perfect chance for the Arsenal centre half to be England's main defender. The 24-year-old plays week in week out for Jonas Eidevall and is sure used to facing big sides like Chelsea, Manchester United and very recently up against VfL Wolfsburg. Wubben-Moy will no doubt make the squad at this rate but could also be a starter.

Bethany England

Age: 28

Club: Tottenham Hotspur

Position: Forward

You could say Beth England has been a forgotten player since her departure from Chelsea at the start of the year but if anything her change of scene at London rivals, Tottenham Hotspur, has been very beneficial for her. In the 17 matches for Spurs, England has so far scored 10 goals and provided one assist which is stats she was not achieving whatsoever when playing under Emma Hayes. Beth has been in Wiegman's squads in the past but was not selected in April so maybe this current form gives the Dutch international something to think about.

Steph Houghton

Age: 35

Club: Manchester City

Position: Defender

Now then, who would have

thought that this name would be doing the rounds again? I certainly didn't but at this time it makes perfect sense to see Steph Houghton back in an England shirt this summer. With the absence of Williamson in central defence, the only higher up in terms of experience is the Manchester City defender that has been out of favour for England ever since last year's European Championship. Wiegman has shared her views on the challenges Houghton has to face to even be considered making the team again. But with all the experience and success Houghton has brought to club and country, she still has a chance even if the chances are slim. Would the 35-year-old accept the offer to rejoin England if given? Who knows.

Katie Zelem

Age: 27

Club: Manchester United

Position: Midfielder

After recently getting called up by Wiegman, many thought Zelem would appear on the teamsheets once again going forwards. A vastly underappreciated player, Zelem is the type of footballer who is always working, always watching and without her, Manchester United would be a much weaker side. Zelem is not just a great player but also a great personality. She has to be in contention after her season.

SCOTTISH STORIES



Scotland friendlies announced

The Scotland Women's National Team will face Northern Ireland and Finland as preparations continue for the inaugural UEFA Women's Nations League later this year.

Pedro Martinez Losa's side will go into the matches on July 14th and 18th respectively, off the back of two solid victories against FIFA Women's World Cup co-hosts Australia and Costa Rica in April. Fixture and ticket details for July international friendlies will be released in due course.

Scotland U16s unbeaten in Switzerland

Scotland Women's Under-16s fought back from two goals down to earn a draw in the first of two friendly matches against Switzerland this week.

With Emma Egli scoring a brace for the Swiss, striking on 4 and 33 minutes. Debutant, Emily Cadell, pulled one back shortly before half-time.

With just over an hour played at Ainslie Park, Freya Brien grabbed the equaliser for the young Scots, which ultimately sealed the draw for Gary Doctor's side.

Buoyed by the fight-back, the young Scots saw out a 1-0 victory over the visitors two days later through Sophie Black's goal.

Winners crowned

Congratulations to Livingston who have been crowned champions of the 2022/23 Championship. Livingston are SWF Championship winners after coming back at home to rescue a point against Renfrew Ladies. The West Lothian club needed only a draw to clinch the title and secure a place in the Scottish Women's Premier League 2 next season.

Edinburgh were named the champions in League One and Queens of the South are the winners of the SWFL South.



SHAAP and Scottish Women's Football launch guidance for youth players

Scotland's elite youth players in women's football are being reminded about the adverse impact of alcohol on their health and ability to compete at the highest level.

To mark the final month of the historic partnership between expert medical group Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems (SHAAP) and Scottish Women's Football (SWF), guidance for youth players on the impact of alcohol has been launched via SWF's social media channel and will be distributed to clubs. The guidance highlights the impact alcohol has on physical and mental health, from impairing coordination ability through to fatigue and anxiety, all of which affect players on and off the pitch. It comes on the back of a survey of youth players which showed that despite being underage and playing football at an elite level, a sizeable proportion of those surveyed had tried alcohol.

Hammill leaves U19s



After almost eight years as a coach with the Scottish FA, Scotland Women's Under-19s Head Coach Pauline Hamill has decided to leave her role.

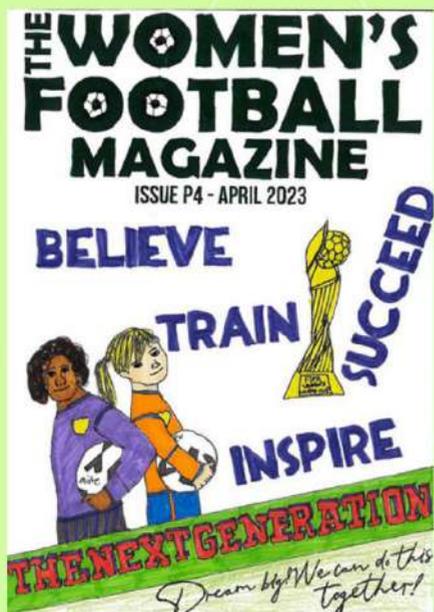
Pauline Hamill: "After many years playing for our national team and coaching every team from under-15s to under-19s, I have decided to leave my post as Women's Under-19s Head Coach to explore other opportunities.

"I would like to thank the Scottish FA for providing me with a platform to develop from being a player to a coach.

I have been very fortunate over the years to have contributed to the growth of our game and been surrounded by so many people who care passionately about the development of women's football in our country.

"Thank you and good luck to the players and staff I have worked with, who gave everything over many years."

A statement from Scottish FA said: "Everyone at the Scottish FA would like to record our thanks and extend our best wishes to Pauline as she embarks on her new ventures."



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Cardiff crowned back-to- back Champions

Words: FAW

Cardiff City were crowned back-to-back FAW Women's Cup winners with a 4-0 victory against Briton Ferry Llansawel.

First-half goals from Eliza Collie, Catherine Walsh and Ffion Price put the Bluebirds in a convincing position at the break and substitute Rhianne Oakley added a fourth late on to ensure City, who beat Cardiff Met 2-0 in last season's final, lifted the cup for the third time.

The victory also secured a double-winning season for Iain Darbyshire's side after being crowned Genero Adran Premier champions in an unbeaten league campaign.

The first attempt of the afternoon came from a Price free kick following a foul on Danielle Green. Price lifted the set piece over the wall but was denied by Courtney Young.

The Bluebirds came close to



getting another shot off shortly after as Catherine Walsh's through ball to Collie was intercepted by a superb slide tackle by captain Lowri Ridings.

Zoe Atkins' header from a Price corner was directed just off target. The pair linked up again minutes later with the former heading on target from the latter's cross.

Another Price cross was almost turned in as Catherine Walsh was next to come close to opening the scoring with a header that flew just wide.

Briton Ferry Llansawel's first attempt on goal came from Mollie Jones, whose left footed strike was saved by Ceryn Chamberlain.

The deadlock was broken through Collie as she slotted the ball under Young after being played through by Atkins.

Catherine Walsh doubled City's lead two minutes later, turning in a deep cross by Megan Bowen.

Atkins came close to adding a third, but her shot was denied by a brilliant Young stop. From the resulting corner, Young saved her side once again, tipping Catherine Walsh's header over the crossbar.

The Bluebirds found their third when a Price corner found its way in at the near post before half time.

Alice Broadley gave Briton Ferry the first chance of the second half but Price recovered and prevented her from getting a shot away. Collie forced a great save out of Young as her lofted effort was saved brilliantly by the goalkeeper.

Substitutes Oakley and McKayla Cook linked up to score the fourth shortly after.

Cymru secure U19s League A promotion

Words: FAW

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. Teisar opened the scoring, while a second half double by Bethan McGowan either side of a goal by attacker Ella Humphrey secured the three points.

Head coach Anderson said "I think today is definitely more of a representation of us, the team



and what they're capable of more so than the Kazakhstan game."

"What the girls have done really well this week is apply themselves. They worked to our Welsh-way principles."

"I think they're good problems to have when you're creating opportunities and now it's about converting those. They will be the margins that will either keep us in League A or bring us back down to League B."

"It's somewhere we genuinely believe we should be more often. We hope the new group that will come together in August will be pushing that more and League A is somewhere we want to make a Welsh home."

Captain Bethan McGowan also expressed her delight at securing League A promotion for next season. "I'm really proud of the players. We started the first game shaky, but today we put

everything into practice, scored goals and stayed together."

"We had a bit of down time after the first game, regrouped and thought of how we could do better, and we ended on a high which is great."

"We're not used to scoring as many goals as we have, and we're playing a more attacking style of football. I'm so proud of everyone and it really has brought us together."

WU19 LEAGUE B RESULTS

Cymru 5-2 Kazakhstan

Tianna Teisar x2, Manon Pearce x2, Lauren Purchase.

Cymru 4-0 Estonia

Tianna Teisar, Bethan McGowan x2, Ella Humphrey.

WELSH WORD



Cymru to play USA in California

Gemma Grainger's side will travel to California to play USA on Sunday 9 July.

The game against the four-time Women's World Cup winners will be played at the Paypal Stadium in San Jose.

In a statement, Grainger said: "To play the current world champions in their final match before the World Cup is a fantastic opportunity. To be asked to play them is a real compliment to our players, we'll be playing top ranked teams in the Nations League in September so it's great we can prepare for that against one of the best teams in the world."

Barry Town lift FAW Girls Cup trophy

Barry Town United lifted the FAW Girls' Cup trophy with a 6-0 victory over Abergavenny at Penydarren Park.

Tay Wynne's brace either side of a strike from Amaya Murphy-Sharil saw the Linnets lead by three inside the opening 20 minutes and Aimee Deacon added a fourth on the half-hour mark.

The midfielder Deacon then fired home her second just after the restart to increase Barry's advantage and Aliya Hull netted a sixth.



Wrexham Women make history

Wrexham Women have secured promotion to the Welsh top-flight and an historic semi-professional status.

Goalkeeper Delyth Morgan said after the game: "We are back where we belong."

2000 people were packed into the Latham Ground in Newtown to watch the game before the women joined the men's team to have a joint promotion celebration with famous owners Rob McElhenny and Ryan Reynolds.

Congratulations to Wrexham!



Women's Tier 2 decisions

The First Instance Body (FIB) met on 4 May to assess and consider the Adran North & Adran South Licence applications.

Clubs are assessed on the following criteria: Sporting, Football Social Responsibility, Infrastructure, Personnel, Legal and Financial.

The Club Licensing system aims to assist the continual improvement and development of football clubs at the top level within Wales. Licensing is a transparent process that enables clubs to demonstrate to their stakeholders that they meet quality standards.

Granted Adran North Licence for 2023/24 Season (8 clubs)

Airbus UK Broughton
CPDM Bangor 1876
Connah's Quay Nomads
CPDM Y Felinheli
Llandudno
Llanfair United
NFA
CPD Y Rhyl

Granted Adran South Licence for 2023/24 Season (9 clubs)

Caldicot Town
Cascade YC
Coed Duon
Cwmbran Celtic
Llanelli Town
Merthyr Town
Penybont
Pontardawe Town
Swansea University

Refused Tier 2 Women's Licence for 2023/24 Season (1 club)

Tonyrefail Welfare

Withdrawn Application for Tier 2 Women's Licence for 2023/24 Season (2 clubs)

Abergavenny
Pencoed Athletic

Clubs who have been refused a Licence by the First Instance Body have ten days in which to submit an appeal.



Defeat for NI

By Zoe Tisdale

Andy Waterworth, Head of Elite Player Development at the Irish Football Association, was announced as the Northern Ireland Women interim manager after Kenny Shiels's departure earlier this year, on 16 March 2023, but what do we know about the man who is taking up his first ever coaching role in the women's game?

Waterworth, aged 36, played at the highest level in the Irish league for teams including Glenavon, Linfield and Glentoran and notched up over 200 goals, he also earned caps for Northern Ireland at u19s and u21s level. Waterworth first gained a coaching qualification in 2002 and then went on to complete his UEFA Pro Licence in 2020, he also heads up the Irish FA JD Academy. The Irish FA Director of Women's Football Angela Platt has commented that they were delighted to have the support of Waterworth until they complete their recruitment process for a permanent boss.

Waterworth's first test came on 16 April 2023 in Cardiff when NI played Wales in a friendly in preparation for the new UEFA Nations League campaign which starts in September. NI last faced Wales in the Uefa Euro 2022 qualifying campaign, gaining

a draw in each respective leg. This was always going to be a tough game with NI not playing a match since Shiels's departure.

NI had a very nervy start with Wales bossing proceedings, Sarah McFadden had to be on top of her game and in usual McFadden style made some superb last ditch tackles. Shannon Turner, who was making her debut for NI in goals showed why she got the call up with some fine saves but Wales broke the deadlock in the 16th minute with Jess Fishlock knocking the ball in to the top corner. A lot of the NI players were still in pre-season and it showed, Wales were much sharper on the ball and well deserved their 3-0 lead at half time with goals from Angharad James and Hannah Cain.

NI improved in the second half and enjoyed having more possession with chances coming from Carragh Hamilton and Chloe McCarron, but they couldn't stop Wales getting their fourth just after the hour mark from Rachel Rowe.

Lauren Wade pulled a goal back for NI, but the match was all but dead and buried and eventually petered out ending in a 4-1 defeat for NI.

After the match Waterworth

explained how he learned a lot about the character of the team especially in the second half and felt the players put in a solid shift. He then went on to say that this team was probably the most professional group he had ever worked with, they were respectful and focused, and after the game they were distraught.

Waterworth has said that even though he enjoyed his time as manager with the woman's team he definitely will not be accepting the job on a permanent basis but has commented that the IFA needs to find the right person to drive them forward, however long it takes, and they will. So, who will be the next women's senior manager? One name that was banded about was Gail Redmond but as we now know she has been appointed as the WU17 and WU19 manager.

It seems the IFA aren't in any rush to appoint a new manager and are willing to wait for the right person to come along. Surely the IFA will want to have a permanent manager in place before the Nations League starts in September as there is a UEFA Women's Euro qualifying place up for grabs. It seems for now though that it's a waiting game for both players and supporters.

NORTHERN IRELAND NATTER



Magill Returns

After 10 months on the sidelines through injury, Northern Ireland striker Simone Magill finally returned to action at the weekend when she made her debut for Aston Villa in a 5-0 win at Reading in the Women's Super League.

The Magherafelt native, who suffered an anterior cruciate ligament injury in Northern Ireland's opening UEFA Women's EURO 2022 game with Norway last July, played the final 15 minutes of the impressive victory and admitted it was a memorable moment for her.

"It was a very special feeling stepping back on the pitch," she told irishfa.com

"Being injured is never nice, especially when it's long-term. Getting back out there made all those long and tough days worth it.

"The club has been fantastic. The timing of events were so unfortunate given I hadn't even got to the club officially, but from the day I got injured the club were there for me."

Goalkeeping pathway

The Irish FA's Coach Education department has introduced a new pathway for goalkeeping coaches.

The pathway aims to develop goalkeeping coaching from grassroots through to senior professional level.

Sean-Paul Murray, Head of Coach Education at the Irish FA, said: "This is an exciting challenge and we are looking forward to rolling it out across the country."

NI to face Scotland

Northern Ireland's senior women's team are set to play two friendlies in July ahead of competing in the inaugural UEFA Women's Nations League this autumn.

One of the fixtures has still to be confirmed, however it was announced today that Northern Ireland will play Scotland away in an international challenge match on Friday 14 July. The venue and kick-off time have still to be confirmed.

Pedro Martinez Losa's Scotland team will go into the match off the back of two solid victories against FIFA Women's World Cup co-hosts Australia and Costa Rica in April.

Northern Ireland, who lost out to Wales in a friendly in April under the guidance of interim boss Andy Waterworth, are expected to have a new permanent manager in place before the fixture in July.



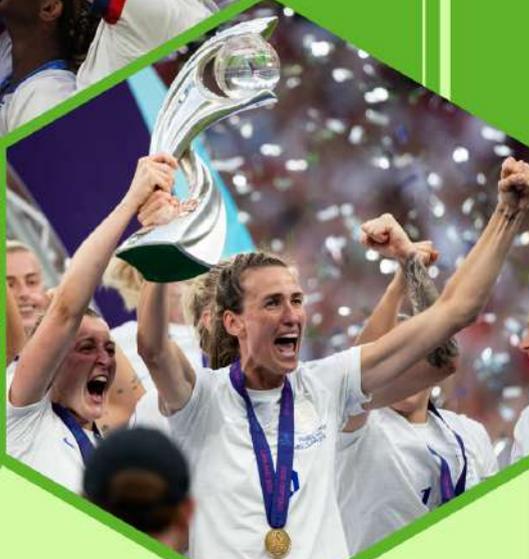
McGuinness honoured

Congratulations to Cliftonville's Caitlin McGuinness.

The NI international has been named as the Ulster Women's Footballer of the Year.

The award is for over the past 12 months which is now in line with the timeline that the men's equivalent award of the same name.





INTERNATIONAL TOURNAMENTS

FA Cup attendances set to to be broken

Words: Paul Donegan

The FA recently announced that the 2023 FA Cup final between Chelsea and Manchester United at the 90,000 capacity Wembley Stadium has sold out. Since the final moved to Wembley in 2015, the record attendance for the final and cup has been beaten five times with the current record of 49,094 set last year. I am going to have a look back at how the attendances for the final have risen over the years.

The first attendance noted for a final was in 1972 of 1,500. They watched Southampton beat Scottish side Lee's Ladies 3-2. This was beaten the following year when 3,000 attended the final between Southampton and another Scottish side Westthorn United. This record was matched in 1977 at Champion Hill in Dulwich for the final between Queens Park Rangers and Southampton.

The 3,000 barrier wasn't broken until the 1991 cup final at Prenton Park between Millwall and Doncaster when 4,000 attended. This record stood until 1999 when 6,450 fans went to The Valley to watch Arsenal beat Southampton 2-0.



This record lasted for two years when for the first time over 10,000 attend a final in 2001. The final at Selhurst Park between Arsenal and Fulham saw 13,824. Four of the following five finals also saw attendances of over 10,000.

The record was next broken in 2007 for the final between Arsenal and Charlton at the City Ground when 24,529 attended. This record was broken the following year, only just though, when 24,582 watched Arsenal win the cup again, this time against Leeds United at the City Ground. The East Midlands seemed to be a popular place for the final as over 23,000 attended the final in 2009 at Derby's Pride Park.

The attendances then dipped below 20,000 for the next few years. The attendance record and the 20,000 barrier wasn't beaten again until the final moved the Wembley. The first final there saw 30,710 attend to watch Chelsea win the cup for the first time when they beat Notts County 1-0.

The record was broken again in the following two years. In 2016,

32,912 attended a London derby between Arsenal and Chelsea, which the Gunners won 1-0. The 2017 final between Manchester City and Birmingham City saw 35,271 attend at see Manchester City win their first FA Cup.

The 40,000 barrier was broken for the first time in 2018 when 45,423 watched Chelsea beat Arsenal 3-1. The following few finals also saw attendances of over 40,000, apart from the behind closed doors final in 2020 due to Covid, but the record would not be beaten until last year.

The 2022 final between Chelsea and Manchester City saw 49,094 attend the final. In one of the best cup finals in recent years, Chelsea won 3-2 after extra-time.

The cup final attendances have come a long way since the first final just over 50 years ago, dramatically getting bigger over the last 20 years or so. Hopefully sold out finals at Wembley Stadium will now become the norm in future years.

Women's Nations League announced

By **Helen Rowe-Willcocks**

Our home nations have found out who they will face in the inaugural Uefa Women's Nations League.

The Women's Nations League will follow a similar format to the men's competition and will also act as Europe's 2024 Olympic qualifiers, with the two finalists joining hosts France in securing one of the three places.

The final standings in the inaugural Women's Nations League during 2023 will also be reflected in the UEFA EURO 2025 European Qualifiers Phase, which will begin in early 2024.

The 51 competing nations for the first-ever Nations League were divided into three Leagues during the draw at UEFA's headquarters in Nyon, Switzerland, with two sets of 16 and another of 19 based on the most recent national team coefficient rankings.

England earned the right to be



placed in League A, where the 16 teams were split into four groups.

And it was decided the Lionesses will face the Netherlands, Belgium and neighbours Scotland as part of League A1, with the sides playing home and away matches against each other.

Wales were drawn in League A3 and will face Germany, Denmark and Iceland.

The four League A group winners will qualify for the knockout finals between 21 and 28 February 2023, which consist of two semi-finals, a third-place game and the final, with the two finalists joining France in securing one of Europe's three 2024 Olympic qualifying places.

The teams which finish fourth in their League A groups will be relegated to League B and replaced by the winners of the League B groups.

The third-placed teams in League A groups will play off against the second-placed teams from League B, with a similar process continuing

between Leagues B and C.

Northern Ireland were drawn in League B1 with Republic of Ireland, Hungary and Albania.

The winners of the four League B groups in the first UWNL will be promoted to League A for the Euro qualifiers.

The four second-placed teams will play against the third-placed teams in League A with the winners of each match playing in League A next time around and the defeated teams playing in League B.

The three best third-placed teams will play off against the three best-ranked second-placed teams of League C. The winners will play in League B for the European Qualifiers phase, while the defeated teams will play in League C.

The lowest ranked third-placed team and the four fourth-placed teams are set to be relegated to League C.

THE DRAW

League A

A1	A2	A3	A4
ENGLAND	FRANCE	GERMANY	SWEDEN
NETHERLANDS	NORWAY	DENMARK	SPAIN
BELGIUM	AUSTRIA	ICELAND	ITALY
SCOTLAND	PORTUGAL	WALES	SWITZERLAND

League B

B1	B2	B3	B4
IRELAND	FINLAND	POLAND	CZECH REPUBLIC
NORTHERN IRELAND	ROMANIA	SERBIA	SLOVENIA
HUNGARY	SLOVAKIA	UKRAINE	BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA
ALBANIA	CROATIA	GREECE	BELARUS

Switzerland

2025

By Helen Jerome

No-one should have been surprised when Switzerland was announced as the host of Euro 2025. After all, it's the home of UEFA and FIFA, and previously co-hosted the 2008 men's Euros. Yet its winning bid – which seems to have been pitched around cheese and chocolate, fresh air and mountains – seems to have surprised pundits and players alike. One of the nation's biggest stars and record goal-scorer, Barcelona's Ana Crnogorcevic said: "Wow, when dreams come true" and her Swiss skipper, Arsenal's Lia Wälti also pronounced it a "dream". No doubt they're dreaming of emulating the Lionesses' success at home in the previous Euros. And with the likes of Aston Villa's Alisha Lehmann, Wolfsburg-bound Riola Xhemaili, and Wälti's club teammate Noelle Maritz providing the backbone of the national team, it's maybe not an impossible dream.

Swiss FA president Dominique Blanc dubbed it an "historic day". They're certainly boosted by getting a new manager, Inka Grings, who has the unrivalled pedigree of being top scorer at the Euros in 2005 and 2009 while playing for Germany, plus she recently guided club team FC Zürich

to the double. "I also feel a boom in Switzerland," she said about Swiss women's football.

Scrolling back, the winning bid was originally meant to be announced in January 2023, but UEFA wanted more detail in the candidates' budget proposals, hence the postponement to April. And at least we're back on track post-pandemic postponement, with the Euros happening every four years – and once again featuring 16 teams, this time across four weeks in June and July 2025.

If we turn our typically precise Swiss clock back even further, there's another neat echo with English women's football, as it's only since 1970 – just one year before England – that women have been allowed to play football in Switzerland.

Maybe there's a little bit of modified rapture, in that many of the Euro 2025 venues are considerably smaller than those used in 2022 across England. In fact the largest, St Jakob-Park in Basel, holds just over 38,000, which is less than half of Wembley Stadium. Plus Switzerland isn't cheap. But there appear to be many pluses in staging it where everything is neatly linked by train, and in stunning locations. Not forgetting the aforementioned cheese and chocolate, of course.

Looking at the other seven stadiums, Bern's Stadion Wankdorf – home of Young Boys – is having its artificial turf replaced for the Euros, and has a capacity of almost 32,000. Geneva's Stade de Genève is home to FC Servet, hosted three men's matches at Euro 2008 and holds 30,000. Zürich's Letzigrund takes 26,000 and may have a pesky athletics track, but I've got my fingers crossed that it will use the giant inflatable grasshopper tunnel that unfurls for club matches.

St. Gallen's kybunpark sits atop a shopping mall and holds just under 20,000, whereas Lucerne's Swissporarena sits amidst mountains and takes just under 17,000. Dating back to two years before Swiss women could even play football, Sion's Stade Tourbillon holds 16,000. Thun's Stockhorn Arena also has to have its artificial pitch replaced, and its capacity is just over 10,000. If you set aside some free time, there are castles and landscapes to explore, and as a cider aficionado I've been tipped off about some of Europe's finest cidemakers plying their trade in some regions.

I'm already a) saving up, b) consulting Swiss train timetables and c) planning some cider tastings...

LOOKING AT THE BIGGEST DISCUSSIONS IN THE GAME

Signs at Matches

Each month Abbie Smith will be delving into the minds of fans, getting their opinions on the biggest debates in women's football. This month...

Should fans bring signs to games asking players for their shirts?

YES

Sophie, 12

Liverpool FC Women supporter

Favourite player: Missy Bo Kearns

Sophie says: 'I think signs are a good idea, but only if they are held up either before or after the match so they don't get in the way. They allow the fans to tell their favourite players how much they appreciate and support them and to have a little interaction that they may not have had otherwise.'

Lucy, 16

Manchester United Women supporter

Favourite player: Katie Zelem

Lucy says: 'I believe that bringing signs to games isn't a bad thing. It allows young fans to have a special conversation with a player that they look up to and sometimes even get a quick hug. Without a sign, I feel that some fans would miss out on this as players wouldn't notice them in the crowd.'

NO

Emma, 15

Chelsea Women supporter

Favourite players: Guro Reiten & Lauren Hemp

Emma says: 'Personally, I am against it. Players must feel that you only care about getting their shirt and not watching the game. It is getting out of hand, especially since fans are holding up signs and shouting out in the middle of the match, distracting the players, and blocking other fans' views.'

Mia, 14

Manchester United Women supporter

Favourite player: Ella Toone

Mia says: 'I've been following the WSL for a while now and as the women's game has grown, so has the number of signs at games. Before, players were more willing to give out their shirts, boots, or gloves occasionally to fans who showed passion for their team. Nowadays, some fans only go to games to try and get given shirts from their favourite players and expect it to happen. There are other ways to go about this that doesn't put pressure on the players or affect other fans watching the game.'



AROUND
THE WORLD

All Change in France

In a polar opposite of the English FA Women's National League cancelling their Northern versus Southern Premier Division play-offs, in 2024, the Fédération Française de Football (FFF) are installing such to decide future championships of their flagship, Division 1 Feminine.

As part of a shake-up, for the future betterment of French football, following on from the hosting of the 2019 Women's World Cup (France were holders and were beaten by eventual winners, United States, in the quarter-finals), and the fact that, in two of the last three seasons, no side from the country has reached the final of the UEFA Women's Champions League.

Between 2016 and 2020, Olympique Lyonnaise had won five consecutive championships, following it up with another success in 2022, however, the two campaigns either side, which saw no French outfit progress beyond the semis in 2021 (Paris Saint-Germain), and the quarter-finals this year (Lyon and PSG), coupled with the aftermath of the last World Cup, and the hosting of the 2025 European Championships (neighbours Switzerland won the Sonia Bompastor, Head Coach

bid), has brought about change. of French giants, and champions, Lyon, hit the nail on the head when she spoke before the second leg of her sides' Champions League tie with Emma Hayes' Chelsea (Chelsea won the quarter-final 4-3 on aggregate): "Since the 2019 World Cup in France, I think we haven't been able to take the right turn.

"England knew how to surf its Euro. But there has been an awareness in France, things are moving.

"There is all the potential in France to be able to move in the right direction to catch up on the delay.

"England was inspired by what was done in France."

There's also been the small matter of a change in football, other countries, including England and Germany, seeing a sizable increase of spectator attendance, whilst the average in France remains below a thousand, it prompting the FFF to launch what was entitled the 'Women's Football Development Plan,' and was chaired by that of 59-year-old Philippe Diallo (interim President of the FFF),

and 74-year-old Jean-Michel Aulas (FFF Executive Committee member, and President of French giants, Lyon, Chairman of National Women's Soccer League outfit, OL Reign).

The proposal therefore, it will see the top four sides at the end of next season, meet in the semi-finals, already scheduled for 12/05/24, with the final the following weekend; the two finalists, and the third place play-off winner, will then represent France in the following season Champions League.

Had the format already been in the place for this season then, at the time of writing, the top four is that of Lyon (won fifteen of last sixteen championships), PSG (2021 winners), Paris FC (six-time champions), and Fleury (FC Fleury 91 Cœur d'Essonne).

Adding to the announcement of the league championship play-offs, the FFF have also increased funding to broadcasting the women's game in France, in regards the league, the Trophée des championnes (Champions Trophy), and the French national team, for the next four years.

Asian internationals are kickstarted



The qualifiers for the Olympic Games, and this year's SEA (Southeast Asian) Games, are running back-to-back in the first half of 2023 in Asia, with the continent's female footballing powerhouses, Vietnam and Thailand, very much to the fore in both competitions.

The Road to Paris 2024 has begun in earnest for the Asian nations with host nation France, alongside that of the United States, Brazil and Colombia having already qualified, in Asia, there's three, yes three rounds of matches, in which to endure.

Initially with three match-days (withdrawals very much a possibility), nations were split into seven groups – and this is just the first round, which ran in the first two weeks of April.

High scores are pretty much guaranteed also with Uzbekistan (Group A) top scoring with nineteen goals in just three games, without conceding;

Thailand (Group D), who along with Vietnam, have dominated the SEA Games over the years, they notched twelve in two outings, also without conceding; and the Philippines (Group E), it was sixteen with conceding in their three.

Those three/four nations alone show a gulf in class which is resonant throughout the sport, however, it's a battle in which only two nations will succeed in, as only they qualify for the Games themselves and even then, the likes of Australia and Japan, the Koreans and China, with China and Japan having appeared at six and five, respectively, of the seven, Olympic tournaments to date.

A five-goal haul from Diyorakhon Khabibullaeva, which included a first half hat-trick, set Uzbekistan on their way to qualification for the Second Round, in the 9-0 first game thrashing of Bhutan; she'd go on to net a hat-trick in their third group game as well,

the 7-0 demolition of Jordan.

In the 23 internationals Khabibullaeva has played for the Uzbeks, she has netted 23 goals, three of those came on her international debut, back in November 2018, as Afghanistan were swept aside, 20-0, in that year's Ventral Asian Football Association (CAFA) Women's Championship tournament. Those eight goals, in two games, have already put her way out in front in the scoring stakes, with the next best, six players, all on three goals apiece – surprisingly, considering the number of goals that have been netted, there's actually only been two, own-goals. Khabibullaeva, should she keep up her goal-a-game average in the next round, she'll easily overtake the top scorers from the 2020 Olympic qualifiers, which was topped by the Taiwanese pair of Yu Hsui-chin (10), and 'Michelle' Pao Hsin-hsuan (9), alongside Myanmar's Win Theingi Tun (9).

The Philippines, who've never reached a World Cup or Olympic Games tournament, and until recent years had very wins on a tournament scale, claimed three-from-three as the Californian-born duo of Chandler McDaniel, and Sarina Bolden scored three apiece, of their overall sixteen.

Attacking midfielders, McDaniel, has played college football at Virginia Tech, and Milwaukee Panthers, whilst Bolden, having represented Loyola Marymount Lions (Los Angeles), is a more travelled player with spells in Sweden, Taiwan, Japan, and currently in Australia.

Anju Tamang was on hand for India, as they had just Kyrgyzstan to overcome, doing so 5-0 and 4-0 over the two games, Tamang with three of the nine, whilst Sandhiya Rangnathan added two of her own in the second game.

At the time of writing, the draw for the Second Round was yet to be made, but it will consist of the seven, qualifying teams, from the previous round, and the five nations who received byes; they'll be drawn from the four pots in which the nations are seeded, and split into three groups.

As with the previous round, three match-days are scheduled, these are to be played between the 26 October and 1 November 2022, with the three group

winners, and the best-ranked runner-up, qualifying for the final round, the sides drawn into two matches, to be played over two legs, on the 24 and 28 February next year, the two winners qualifying for the 2024 Paris Games.

Asian representatives' best at the Olympic Games, since the 1996 introduction, China were runners-up in the first final, losing 2-1 to the United States, at the start of August, whilst Japan matched that in the summer of 2012, again losing 2-1 to the United States in early August.

Immediately after the opening round of the Olympic qualifiers had concluded, most of the Asian nations were pretty much straight back out, in what is the 32 SEA Games, this being held in Cambodia, a country based in the southern Indochinese Peninsula.

Thailand were the first winners of the SEA Games, back in 1985, winning a round-robin tournament, in Bangkok, becoming the first of only two nations to win the competition with Vietnam, the only other victors, not entering until 1997, going on to win seven, and be runners-up in two, in the ensuing years.

Myanmar meanwhile, they've been third on seven occasions, including three-in-a-row in 2013, 2017, and 2019; Vietnam's first success, it was claimed

under the guidance of a Liverpoolian named Steve Darby who, after failing to make the grade as a player, headed to the Far East, and has coached there since the late seventies, winning numerous competitions.

Mai Đức Chung on the other-hand, is the most successful coach at the games, leading Vietnam to three five victories, including at the last three tournaments, seeing off rivals Thailand in each of them. This year's tournament, with two groups of four, runs through the first half of May, Group A saw Vietnam, the ten-times winners, and holders, drawn with Philippines, Myanmar, and Malaysia, with Vietnam defeating Malaysia 3-0 in their opening game as Pham Hai Yen, herself a three-time winner of the competition, scoring the first after five minutes.

It was the same scenario in Group PB, Thailand, grouped with hosts Cambodia, Singapore, and Laos, defeated Singapore 4-0 with Saowalak Pengngam, with her fourth goal against the same opponents, netting five minutes in. With the top two sides from both groups qualifying for the semi-finals, it'll be a battle for second place, and who wants it the most, those games taking place on the 12 May, and both the Bronze, and Gold medal matches, occurring three days later, in Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia.

News from Around the World

EA Sports responds to NWSL Players

EA Sports have issued a response after several NWSL players criticised the publisher for their appearance in FIFA 23. As part of Title Update 9, the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) were included but a handful of players called them out claiming they had been misrepresented. On Friday, March 24, EA said: "We're aware of several issues with the depiction of certain players. We take representation seriously, celebrating athlete diversity is vitally important."



Barca win La Liga

The FC Barcelona Women's team won its fourth consecutive La Liga title on Sunday after scoring 3-0 against Sporting de Huelva at the Estadi Johan Cruyff. This triumph placed the Barça players as the winners of Liga F after a 100% record in the competition. Even though there are still four games to go in the season, the team won 26 matches of the 26 played, only conceding five goals and scoring 108. The win against Sporting du Huelva was their 61st in a row.

NWSL expects to expand by 2026

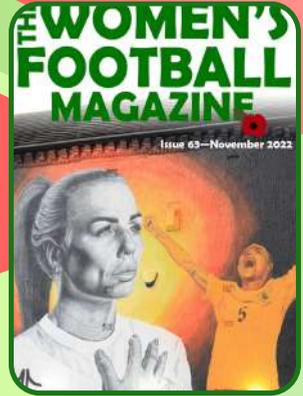
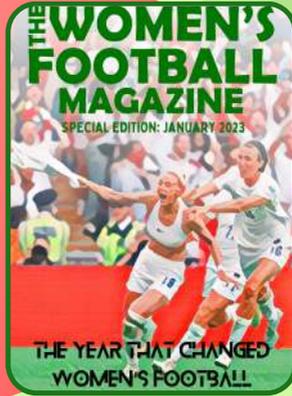
The NSWL expects to expand to 16 teams for the 2026 season, commissioner Jessica Berman said in an interview with The Washington Post on Tuesday. Here's what you need to know: "We do expect for the 2026 season to add two more teams," Berman said. "That process will begin later this calendar year, and through the process we ran in 2022 for this round of expansion, we have an incredible amount of interest from qualified investors who want to get in early."



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