

W F A

— THE WOMEN'S FOOTBALL MAGAZINE —

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



Editor's Note

Welcome to our June 2023 Digital Edition

It's been quite a season across the leagues and it's almost sad that it has drawn to an end. The WSL went down to the last day both at the top and bottom of the table which led to a seriously exciting last 90 minutes. This issue we have interviews with Ona Batlle, Grace Clinton and Niamh Dearsey as well as articles looking at the ACL injuries, the upcoming Women's World Cup and so much more. Our July print issue is up for pre-order so make sure you check it out - it includes a wonderful wall chart to keep track of the summer's tournament. There is so much to look forward to and that's before the transfer window opens. There is already plenty of rumours circling so it looks like there is going to be no rest for us all. On a slightly less positive note, we were disappointed to hear the news about Reading and sending all our thoughts go to all the staff and players who have been affected by the news.

Helen Rowe-Willcocks
Editor-in-chief

TWFM

— THE WOMEN'S FOOTBALL MAGAZINE —



ABOUT US

Founded in 2017, The Women's Football Magazine celebrates women's football from grassroots to the four home nations.

We are proud to tell the stories that haven't been heard, that need to be heard and are there to inspire our next generation of footballers.

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Quarterly themed printed magazine covering a wide range of topics with in-depth interviews, features and opinion pieces.

TWFM Awards

The only women's football awards celebrating the game from grassroots to the home nations.

Calendar

Annual wall calendar featuring the best photographs from the year - the perfect present for any keen football fan

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ONIA BATTLE



Whether it is putting in key challenges at the back or assisting in goals from the wing, Ona Battle is one of the first names on the team sheet each week.

The Spanish international has regularly impressed this season with her crosses into the box from the right proving a powerful asset.

As well as recording 15 assists so far this season – highest in the Women's Super League – Battle also scored the fourth goal in a 5-0 thriller at Old Trafford against Aston Villa.

Since joining the club in 2020, the defender quickly became a fan favourite down at Leigh Sports Village due to her determination and speed down the wing.

Battle is also part of Marc Skinner's leadership group having worn the armband on occasion with the United boss showing confidence that he can always rely on her.

As the season draws to an end, Battle sat down at Carrington to look back on some of her favourite moments from a record-breaking season for United.

The season is rapidly coming to an end, have you got a standout moment so far from the season?
I think the main thing for me is

seeing how together we are as a team. Every morning we play games together when we are having breakfast and that sort of thing is good.

To spend that time with the girls, I think it is really nice. It is something I really enjoy. Then when you look at us on the pitch, you can see that togetherness.

For example, when we played at the Emirates and we won in the last minute, it was a really nice feeling. It was special because we all celebrated together as a team, we all worked together as a team and it worked. It was one of my favourite moments of this season for sure.

What has been the toughest moment so far this season for you personally?
It's hard to say really. I have been lucky because it has been a really nice season for me. So far it has been the best season I have had with the team.

I am so happy with the girls, with the progression we are making. I am enjoying it here so much.

I think I have been playing really well as well. I think when we drew against Manchester City that was one of the most difficult moments. Games where we didn't quite play are best are always frustrating. They are not

the best moments for the team.

What positives do you think you can take from this season?

I think as a group we have grown a lot, we have really come together as a team. We are a much better team and I think we are at our best when we really know each other and that is something which has grown a lot this season.

As you get to know the girls more the more we all play together, the more we trust each and the more we grow not just as individuals but also as a team.

We know everything about how we are feeling on the pitch and off the pitch.

You mentioned the togetherness of playing games together at breakfast, what has the mindset been like within the team this season?

We are a family. We are very connected. A lot of the players have been together for a number of years now and that really helps.

I think that is the most important thing. To be a good team you have to get on and we are all family here.

The players are not just good footballers, they are good humans. If you work at being a good human, being a good footballer is secondary to that to me.



You look like you are really enjoying playing this season, how have you found the new players who have come into the squad this season?

I think that everyone who is coming in gets a warm welcome. We try to be as welcoming as possible. It can be daunting because a lot of us have been together for a long time.

We have a good team and we have a good understanding. When new players come in they see that and that we understand each other. With Maya [Le Tissier] we have a really good understanding in the back. We do as much as we can to make sure that we involve people as much as we can when they first arrive.

Have there been any of your teammates who have really impressed you this season?

I think it has been a really good season for Alessia Russo. I think she has been really good and she is so important for the team. She is always there when we need that extra bit of fire in a game.

Marc Skinner has praised your resilience a lot this season, would you say that the results you have had to fight for have been more important in your growth?

For sure. When we fight until the very end that feeling of strength and unity is there until the final whistle. I enjoy those games a lot more than the games when we win comfortably – not that any of the games have been easy.

I think when we are suffering on

I think when we are suffering on the pitch and when we have to fight until the end, you have to grow and you have to find new ways to win.

You are working hard and then when you get the three points at the end, nothing beats that feeling. When we have tight games, they are the games that I enjoy the most. Looking back at the season, for example, the win against Arsenal, those are the games I enjoy the most. If we give 100% everything follows after that.

It's still unsure as to whether Battle will be at Manchester United next season but one thing is for sure, she is a superstar.

"She, without doubt in my mind, is one of the best right backs, if not the best, right back in the world. She's a great, great leader, great character and wants to win everything that she plays."

Marc
Skinner





BARCLAYS WOMEN'S SUPER LEAGUE

WSL Statistics

2022/23

14

MARY EARPS BROKE
THE CLEAN SHEET RECORD

58

MOST POINTS IN A 22-GAME
WSL SEASON

47,367

HIGHEST ATTENDANCE, SINGLE GAME
ARSENAL 4-0 TOTTENHAM, EMIRATES STADIUM

3

MARC SKINNER
MOST FA WSL MANAGER OF THE MONTH AWARDS
(EQUAL WITH EMMA HAYES 2019/20 SEASON)



What's with all the ACL injuries?

Words: Clare McEwen



It won't have escaped your notice anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injuries in female footballers have reached ridiculous levels. Ruptured ACLs are long-term, serious injuries, causing months of pain, rehabilitation, and uncertainty for players. This season Arsenal women alone have racked up four. At the time of the 2022 Ballon d'Or, a quarter of nominees had ACL injuries - can you imagine that being accepted in the men's game? The football world needs to act now.

ACL injuries occur in males but occur between three and eight times as often in females. That's a huge difference! ACL ruptures occur most often in sports like basketball and football - those involving sharp movements. In the U.S. it has been reported that up to 80,000 high school female

athletes suffer ACL injuries each year. Read that again. Tens of thousands of young women and girls suffer these long-term, serious injuries, with the peak incidence at age 16. What's worse is, this isn't a new finding: this has been known since the 1990s.

ACL injuries are an unusual injury as they're rarely a result of contact. They usually occur because of a sudden and awkward stop just before a player changes direction. The player then hears a 'pop' before falling to the ground - an all-too-common story in the past year if you watch women's sport. Despite how common ACL injuries are in female athletes, nothing has been done to lower this risk. Compare that with male sport and the risk has been gradually reduced over the past 20 years.

So what factors, so far, are

known to affect ACL injury risk in females and how could they be lowered to protect girls and women in the future?

Workload. Last month I talked about scheduling and how player fatigue increases the risk of serious injury. The workload in the women's game has increased dramatically over recent years, as has intensity of the matches. Reducing fixture numbers and increasing recovery times between games could have a quick impact on ACL injuries.

Anatomy and Biomechanics. The female body is built differently to the male body: fact. Differences in physiology mean more strain on certain areas of the body and different injury types. For example, females have wider hips, which leads to a different angle of the leg into the knee. Different forces are

then put through the ligaments and tendons of the knee, especially when jumping, landing or suddenly changing direction. Under-developed leg muscles can make injury more likely. Investing in biomechanics experts to put together preventative gym plans to work on specific muscle groups and the balance between them could improve individual stability, reducing imbalances that lead to injury. Biomechanics differ between people, so individualised assessments and programmes for those most at risk would likely reduce the most serious injuries.

Suitable facilities and equipment. Women do not have the same access to top training facilities as men. Even top WSL sides don't have access to the same facilities used by the men's sides. Rehabilitation facilities, lower quality pitches, and football boots designed for men all increase the risk of long-term injuries. The whole set-up in the women's game remains inferior to that of the men's, with each factor adding to the risk of injury.

Lower quality pitches mean studs are more likely to catch in the ground, leading to twisted knees; uneven surfaces may lead to riskier landing.

Boots were designed for male movement, which differs from female movement - differences in anatomy and biomechanics

mean we run differently, for instance. Length of studs could make a difference, meaning women are more likely to dig their boots into the ground, leading to injury. There may be plenty of boots on the market aimed at women, but very few are designed for women. New brands are beginning to emerge with boots designed especially for female feet, with narrow heels, slightly different bend points and different studs. Research focused on determining how much these designs help and their interaction with female biomechanics could lead to further design modifications and hopefully fewer injuries.

The above three risk factors link together. Fatigued legs are more likely to suffer injury. Researching into the impact of fatigue on biomechanics could provide avenues for further tweaking of muscle strengthening programmes. But good facilities and access to specialists are also needed to put the research into practice. This triangle of modifiable risk factors (things we can change) would likely reduce the number of ACL injuries in women.

And then there's factor four: hormones. Hormones get blamed often for ACL injuries in women - it's the obvious target when rates of injury are so much higher in females. Although research is still limited, it would be surprising if hormones didn't play a prominent role in injury. Levels of oestrogen and progesterone vary throughout the menstrual

cycle and are responsible for many changes throughout the month. Higher oestrogen levels, for instance, can alter the stability of ligaments and tendons. An even greater threat to joint stability is likely to be relaxin - a hormone which also changes throughout the cycle. Although also found in men, relaxin affects the ACL in females in a way it doesn't in men: high relaxin levels in females have been linked to high ACL injury rates - although there is relatively little research in this area so far. Hormonal changes may be trickier to address than the physiological factors, but hormonal contraceptives and menstrual cycle tracking could help to reduce risk from ACL injury.

What is clear is that more research and more resources must be directed to understanding and addressing the risk of ACL injuries in females. With more girls entering the sport it's the duty of governing bodies to protect players, as much as possible, from injury. Widespread research is needed to gather enough data to draw meaningful conclusions and create prevention strategies and programmes to protect players of all ages.

This can't be ignored any longer: we must invest now, research deeply, and stop ACL injuries becoming weekly news.

And now... the end (of the season) is here

By Lydia Charles, age 10

My recent experience with Preston North End has been incredible I have enjoyed playing with my team as always and now we're nearing the end of the season I'm enjoying it even more, I have been focusing on some skills and making sure my passes are as accurate as can be. I am also looking forward to my Summer tournaments and hoping the team ends up with a good result. There has been real progress this year, we started as a brand new team and were losing most of our games with our opponents getting high numbers of goals; now we are not losing as many and the scores are lower. Winning at playing not playing at winning.

And while starting with endings may be unusual it is how it is at the end of the season. The last three league games Manchester United Women's Team have played have been action packed, and that doesn't include the FA Cup Final at Wembley.

Aston Villa vs Manchester United

Well, this was quite a match there were some hilarious moments in the game as well as impressive. First of all, it is great that we can go to away games like this and have a great time and it is nice to get to see where other

people play their matches and I always enjoy the experience of getting to travel to go to an away game. I have to say there was an hilarious moments in the game an example being when a duck flew onto the pitch at half time and wouldn't come off and when it did it just kept coming back this was so funny as the players tried to get the duck to go away but it wouldn't budge until finally one of the girls shoed it away! The match itself was a cracking game and personally my favourite moment was when in the second half we were 2-2 thanks to Nikita Parris scoring the equaliser and then in the 90+3rd minute just before the whistle was going to blow Millie Turner scores one of the best goals I have ever seen! The crowd was roaring with excitement what a great match to be able to experience.

FA Cup Final -

Manchester United vs Chelsea

First of all, I was extremely excited to get to go to Wembley even though it was a very long drive there and back. The great thing was this time there were flags that had been provided for the fans, in fact I still have them now as we were allowed to take them home! Everywhere you looked there were flags waving to show excitement and support. This time it looked like we had a



chance of winning as we were playing incredibly well and by the end of the first half it was 0-0 which was good because usually in the past we would already be losing so we showed potential. Unfortunately, even though we tried our best a goal was scored by Sam Kerr to lead Chelsea to yet another win. Although we lost, I am still extremely proud of the girls as it was an incredible achievement to get to our first FA Cup Final. Maybe next year? Hopefully our luck will change.

Manchester United vs Manchester City

We were back at Leigh Sports Village and to my surprise there were more flags! I think this is a great thing that not only Wembley but LSV had flags too. I can tell you given that we had just lost against Chelsea we bounced back. At half time the result was 1-0 to us thanks to Hayley Ladd 's wonder strike in the second minute - what a start to the game! Manchester City had goalie Ellie Roebuck sent off after a challenge on Nikita Parris. Even though that was a disadvantage for them it was an advantage for us. In the second half City player Angelde scored but Lucia Garcia scored in the 90+1 minute meaning we went victorious in the end. The attendance was incredible just like the atmosphere as it was 7,864 people - a new record at LSV. David De Gea and Sarina Wiegman were also spotted in the crowd. Also what thrills me is that last

year the average attendance would be about 1,500 and to think that at this match there was over 7,500 fans there it just shows how far women's football has actually come so it is nearly five times over what it used to be, isn't that just outstanding!

Liverpool vs Manchester United

This match was incredible, once again I enjoyed the match we had an extremely good line up as this was the last game of the season I got really stuck in with the chants and songs. The atmosphere was mind-blowing as there was an attendance of 5,778! It was a really entertaining game and I have to admit Liverpool have really stepped up their game since last time we beat them 6-0. Unsurprisingly, Mary had another clean sheet which is a great way to end the season for her and we played extremely well given that it was another boiling day. At half time it was still 0-0 they were heading for a draw until only 3 minutes in after being substituted Lucia Garcia scored in the 72nd minute, who was assisted by defender Maya Le Tissier, which lead us to a great win for our last match. Unluckily, we only came second in the league behind Chelsea (by two points!) but is still an incredible result which means we get to go on a European tour! How exciting, it will definitely be a great experience for the girls in Manchester United and hopefully they and the fans enjoy it.



The best signings of the 2022/23 WSL season

By Abbie Smith

Rachel Daly- Aston Villa



In her first season back on home soil, the all-rounder was awarded the Golden Boot and named Player of the Season after scoring 30 goals in 30 games. Daly scored twice on her debut, a 4-3 win over giants Manchester City, and scored a hat-trick home and away against Reading. Her 22 WSL goals equalled a record previously held by one Vivianne Miedema, cementing Daly as the best attacker in the league. Outside of the WSL, Daly scored six FA Cup goals in four games, including four in Villa's 11-0 thrashing of AFC Fylde, and was once again an integral part of Sarina Wiegman's squad.

Maya Le Tissier- Manchester United



Le Tissier joined the Red Devils in July 2022 after four years at Brighton & Hove Albion and impressed from the off. She scored twice on her debut, a 4-0

opening day victory over Reading, and helped United keep five clean sheets in their opening six matches.

The defender went on to make 22 WSL appearances, scoring and assisting twice, and made her England debut in November 2022. In future seasons, Le Tissier will no doubt be regarded as one of United's best defenders and will become a regular starter for England.

Bethany England- Tottenham Hotspur



After spending her time in west London in the shadow of Sam Kerr, England craved change. Her record-fee move to Tottenham gave her the chance to flourish and grow into her own, scoring 12 goals in 12 games.

Her stellar performances led to her being called up to the England squad for the upcoming Women's World Cup, an achievement that feels even greater after her omission from the last camp. England is no doubt the breath of fresh air that Spurs needed.

Victoria Pelova- Arsenal



The midfielder joined the Gunners from Ajax in January. Since then, she has made 12 appearances, scored one goal, and made three assists. In a team riddled with injuries and absences, the Dutchwoman shone, showcasing her ability to play on either flank or lead from the middle. Already a fan favourite, Pelova's talent will be key in Arsenal's Champions League battle next season.

Jordan Nobbs- Aston Villa



After 12 years at Arsenal, Nobbs departed for pastures new. Aston Villa offered a new challenge, one in which she could reconnect with football. So far, she has played 11 games, scoring four goals, three of which came in a 6-2 away win at Brighton & Hove Albion. Her work-rate and pure passion has helped her to gain back her place in the national team and led to her being called up to Wiegman's World Cup squad.

BARCLAYS WSL NEWS



Konchesky leaves West Ham

Paul Konchesky has left his role as manager of West Ham United at the end of the season. The Hammers finished eighth in the league and reached the semi-finals of the Conti Cup. Konchesky said: "I am proud and honoured to have had the opportunity to manage this Club. My players and my staff have always given me 100 per cent and while some of our results have been disappointing this season, we still have a lot to be proud of, including reaching the semi-final of the Conti Cup. I wish the Club well for the future."

Arsenal announce Emirates games

Arsenal have announced they will play five Women's Super League matches at the Emirates Stadium during the 2023/24 season. This will be an increase from the three WSL games the Gunners played at the stadium during the last campaign. All three of these games got attendances of over 40,000, and including Champions League matches, over 240,000 tickets were purchased to watch Arsenal Women matches at the Emirates. Arsenal CEO, Vinai Venkatesham said: "We've received fantastic support at the Emirates Stadium this year, setting a new record attendance in the WSL and achieving a memorable sell-out for our recent UEFA Women's Champions League semi-final against Wolfsburg earlier this month".

Daly named 'best player'

Rachel Daly has been named Women's Super League Player of the Season. Daly scored 22 league goals during the season, helping Villa to a fifth-placed finish. She also won the Golden Boot, equalling Vivianne Miedema's league record of goals scored. She became the first English player to score 20 goals in a season. Also nominated for Player of the Season were Sam Kerr, Guro Reiten, Ona Batlle, Leah Galton, Kirsty Hanson, Bunny Shaw and Frida Maanum. Emma Hayes was named WSL Manager of the Season.



Ward extends her Villa contract

Aston Villa manager Carla Ward has signed a contract extension until the end of the 2024/25 season, with the option to extend for a further year. Ward joined the club before the 2021/22 season and has led the Villans to ninth and fifth place finishes in the Women's Super League in her two seasons in charge. Villa's head of women's football, Lee Billiard, said "This is tremendous news for Carla and the Club. We have continued to see substantial improvement in the team under her leadership, both individually and collectively, and this contract extension will allow her to continue progressing and building on our strategy to try to develop young players while putting Aston Villa at the heart of the women's game in England at this exciting time."

Wave Goodbye, Say Hello!

By Helen Jerome



They came, they saw, they conquered. Magda Eriksson then Pernille Harder joined and fell in love with Chelsea, having already fallen in love with one another back in 2014. And now they're off to pastures new – Bayern Munich – as only one of them was apparently offered a new contract at Chelsea, and as a couple they understandably want to be together.

Magdalena Eriksson joined in 2017 from Linköpings, and Pernille Harder in 2020 from Wolfsburg, but 2022-23 was a defining season for both of them – and for Chelsea. Yes, Sam Kerr and Guro Reiten got all the plaudits, but it was the Swede and the Dane who pushed the team to sometimes frankly unlikely achievements this year.

Eriksson has been the beating heart of Emma Hayes' side, perhaps more than ever this past season, and with Millie Bright missing with injury, plus Kadeisha Buchanan out for a long

stretch, her captaincy was the glue that kept them going. That leadership in adversity propelled them all the way to the Champions League semi-final against all expectations, when they could have easily given into the attacking might of Olympique Lyon in the quarters. And Eriksson's goal at home to Arsenal in the duo's final home game of the season helped secure the WSL title for the Blues.

With Harder, the story was impactful in a different way. Out for half the season with her own hamstring injury, Harder returned with so much determination, as if making up for lost time in just the last handful of matches. And she did. A flurry of goals in the WSL, and the game-changing moment in the record-breaking, sold-out FA Cup Final against Manchester United at Wembley when she came on as a second half sub. In that one tactical change, Chelsea switched from an attritional, almost unwatchable, route-one

style, to having two upfront, and Harder immediately took the match by the throat, and laid on the winner for Kerr to tap in.

The news that many fans dreaded was confirmed on social media by an emotional Eriksson. "It's difficult to talk about or even say out loud," she said. "It feels kind of surreal... I will be leaving Chelsea at the end of the season. It's been six unbelievable years. I feel so privileged to have been on this journey with the club. I feel not only sad, I'm also really really happy and proud of the whole journey and everything we've been through together. It's mixed emotions for sure."

Harder spoke of loving every single minute along the way and leaving the club with so many great memories and friendships, as well as it being "a dream coming true playing for this amazing club".

Eriksson talked of being incredibly honoured when manager

Emma Hayes made her captain in her third season at Chelsea, and how winning was at the heart of everything they did, with a “contagious” competitiveness across her six seasons in West London.

Crucial to Eriksson’s happiness was being reunited with Harder when she joined: “I felt now I get the best of both worlds. I get to be at a club that I love, I get to play the game that I love, but I also get to have close family nearby, and have someone that I will share all the joys with and share the whole experience with. Also success off the pitch, our fight for the LGBTQ+ community, stuff that we wouldn’t have been able to do if we weren’t living together.”

Notably, they were the first couple to sign up for Common Goal, where footballers pledge 1% of their earnings to organisations driving social change.

“Their donations go to the global initiative, PlayProud, that aims to make team sports safer and more welcoming for LGBTQ+ youths. Eriksson said they had played without privilege and are now privileged, “so now we want to give back.”

After the FA Cup Final and just before the final home game v Arsenal, Hayes said: “There’s not enough words to describe

the impact, Magda particularly because she’s been here longer, has had on the club. For P and Mags to have their moment... was so important and they get their chance to say goodbye to the fans.

“That means more than anything to the players. You have to put your ego aside, these are two players who deserve that stage and let’s give them that.”

Hayes describes Harder as one of the most eccentric characters she’s ever coached. “I will miss her eccentricity, her attention to detail, her thirst for winning. Both of them are going to provide their next club with a lot of quality and we’ve lost a lot, no doubt. But equally we’re happy for both of them and we’re very proud of everything they’ve done here.”

“I love them. I’m proud of P and Mags and I’ll watch them and keep an eye on them. When you coach someone, you coach them for life, in so many different ways... as a football club it’s important we send the players who meant a lot to us off in the way we want to do it.”

That was May. Now it’s June and the duo have officially joined Bayern Munich. Harder beams with excitement at being back in the Bundesliga after three years away.

The other plus is that they’re moving there together. “We can stay together, we have had long distance before and we don’t want that again. So we are really happy to be here, both of us.”

For Harder, the Bayern team “has so much potential and I wanted to be a part of that. I hope I can keep developing as a player and also as a person.” Eriksson adds that all her Swedish teammates have enjoyed their time at Bayern, and the duo both feel really positive about the head coach, Alex Straus.

As for Straus, he can’t disguise his joy at their arrival: “It’s huge for us, two international players with a lot of experience, who have been in other clubs and won trophies, so it’s a very good addition to our squad. We are very happy.”

Meanwhile the ever-pragmatic Hayes is already looking at plugging Chelsea’s Eriksson and Harder-shaped gaps with defender Ashley Lawrence from PSG, midfielder Sjoekie Nusken from Frankfurt, and striker Esther Gonzalez from Real Madrid, with maybe the possibility of Lyon’s US star Catarina Macario, although she has just suffered an ACL injury...



THE LIFE OF A SUPER FAN

By Abbie Smith

Arsenal superfan Jasmine details her footballing journey and how Leah Williamson led her to falling in love with the beautiful game.

What team do you support?

Arsenal.

Who is your fave player(s) and why?

My favourite player is Leah Williamson. When she hasn't played, the team often struggles to keep the ball out of their box. Leah will always hold up the defensive side of the team and will instruct/advise other members of the team on how to avoid the ball getting to her end. Finally, Leah is a good role model to everyone both in the football world and in everyday life.

What match has been your favourite to watch?

My favourite match to watch was the Arsenal v United game in November. Although we didn't win, Leah and Rafaelle were out injured and Beth tore her ACL, it was the first Arsenal game that I got to watch live. I got to see the team in person (and Mary Earps) and the atmosphere was amazing. From the off, United looked like they were going to win. Then, we pulled it back and were ahead, but

United equalised. During extra time, Russo scored the winning goal. It was a very back and forth game, where everyone was sat on the edge of their seats.

If you could pick a rival player to sign for your team, who would you pick and why?

I would pick Mary Earps to join Arsenal. She's a great goalkeeper who has an impressive number of clean sheets and would make our defence unbreakable. She is also a natural leader and would add to the talent that is already at Arsenal.

Who do you think will win the WWC?

I'm not sure who will win. I think England will do well, but probably won't win it. If I had to guess, it would probably be the USA.

What made you fall in love with the women's game?

I fell in love with football during the Euros final. The game just happened to be on TV. The girls played with so much passion and you could see that they were giving everything that they had. I had never watched football before, but watching the Euros final definitely sparked the interest in me to watch more games and follow the success of the Lionesses. After watching a few more games, I realised that I was hooked and had fallen in love with football.

BARCLAYS WSL NEWS



Houghton signs new contract

Manchester City captain Steph Houghton has signed a new one-year deal.

The 35-year-old has been at City since their formation in 2014 and will reach a decade at the club next year.

The defender, who is not in England's World Cup squad for this summer, has won eight trophies, including one Women's Super League title, in 233 games for City. "I want us to be competing on all fronts in terms of trophies and I want to play a big part in that," she said.

Leicester release 12 players

Former club captain Sophie Barker is among 12 Leicester City players released by the Women's Super League unit. Championship title winners Kirstie Levell, Charlie Devlin and Lachante Paul will also leave the club when their contracts end. Leicester beat Brighton on the final day of the season to retain their top-flight status for another season. Molly Pike, Jess Sigsworth, Abbie McManus, Connie Scofield and Jemma Purfield will also be seeking new clubs along with youngsters Ellen Jones and Georgia Eaton-Collins. "Our thanks go out to all the players who are moving on this summer for their efforts in a Leicester City shirt," said manager Willie Kirk.

Harrop released by Tottenham

Women's Super League (WSL) record appearance maker Kerys Harrop has been released by Tottenham Hotspur. The defender has made 183 WSL appearances, with her most recent coming against West Ham on the final day of the 2022-23 season. Harrop, 32, is one of six players to leave Spurs. Kyah Simon, Chioma Ubogagu, Cho So-hyun and Esther Morgan have been released, while Mana Iwabuchi leaves after the end of her loan from Arsenal. Spurs finished ninth in the WSL, surviving relegation after beating Reading.



James signs new contract to 2027

Chelsea forward Lauren James has signed a new four-year deal with the Women's Super League champions. England international James, 21, joined the Blues from Manchester United in 2021 and her new contract extends her stay until 2027. She made 18 appearances and scored five goals this season, helping the Blues to their fourth successive title. "It's an amazing feeling to extend my stay at the club I love and where I feel most at home," said James. "I'm looking forward to the future and I want to reach my full potential. I want to be the best version of me as a player and as a person, helping to inspire the next generation. It definitely feels like home and it's always been the place I've wanted to be." She has been named in head coach Sarina Wiegman's squad for the World Cup this summer and has won 10 caps.



BARCLAYS CHAMPIONSHIP



Reading shock

Reading FC will revert to part-time football after their relegation from the Women's Super League, the club has announced.

The club finished bottom of the WSL and dropped into the second tier for the first time since 2015.

In a statement, they say that owner Dai Yongge had personally invested approximately £6m in the women's set-up since taking charge in 2018.

The club says it now needs to look at a more "sustainable" model.

Although the club acknowledges the increase in interest following England's Euro 2022 success, relegation from the WSL will result in a significant drop in broadcast fees and FA central funding.

"Difficult but necessary financial decisions are being made across the business following the club's relegation to League One last season," said Reading CEO Dayong Pang.

"After discussions with the FA, the decision to operate on a part-time basis represents the most viable solution at the present time.

"We would like to acknowledge all of the hard work and unquestionable dedication of [manager] Kelly Chambers and her coaching staff, the players and all the staff.

"The club will now be working extremely hard

to build a team to proudly represent our town in the Championship in the 2023-24 campaign."

The news came as a great shock to many of those in the profession.

Speaking about the announcement Rachel Furness said: "Such a sad day that this is still happening in women's football. Really feel for the people who I know associated with this club. Another let down and step backwards in what we thought was a growing and progressive sport."

Chloe Peplow added: "It shows there is still so much more to do. I am thankful for my two seasons spent at Reading but looking forward to moving on to pursue new opportunities."

Former Reading player Fara Williams wrote: "Devastated to see this happen. I am gutted for the staff and the players."

Former Wales defender Kath Morgan believes the decision will have a negative impact on Wales as well. Current Wales internationals Gemma Evans, Lily Woodham, Bethan Roberts and Rachel Rowe are all on Reading's books.

"It's a huge problem for the individuals concerned and it's going to affect the Wales national team and (Wales manager) Gemma Grainger, so I'm really worried about the situation the girls find themselves in," Morgan said.

Grace Clinton



Young Manchester United star Grace Clinton has had an impressive end to the season.

The young player went on loan to Bristol City in January and came back with a promotion and an award to remember her time there. Now back at Manchester United, she looks back on her loan spell success at the Championship club.

Grace, how do you sum up your time at Bristol City?

It's hard to. It was such an amazing experience, I could not have imagined that it would be that amazing. When I think of Bristol, it's all smiles really.

When you look back to January, what were your hopes for the loan spell?

I am a young player so all I really hoped was that I was going to get to play. For me it was just to get experience and grow and get minutes on the pitch really.

Did you set yourself any targets when you went?

You always have your little targets that you want to reach whether it's goals or something else. For me my main target was to win the league with Bristol City.

Have you got a standout moment from the season?

It's got to be scoring the opener at Ashton Gate. That game was a big one and experiences like that will help me develop so much in my career. We were on pressure to win the league in that game so getting the opener was a surreal feeling.

You were named Bristol City's young player of the season, how proud are you of that achievement?

I was shocked to be honest because I had only been at the club since January. It's such a short amount of time. We found out the winners

the week before the awards evening because not everyone could make it on the night.

When they said about me winning the award, there was just in the moment shock because I just didn't expect it at all. It was a nice feeling.

It was nice to go and dress up for something and you can celebrate. You have achieved something and you can dress up and go and celebrate with your friends and teammates.

What would you say you have learned about yourself?

So much and that is exactly what I wanted to do. Things like learning my routine, my different mindsets before I go into a game. Stepping on that pitch every week you can see different behaviours that come out of you, especially ones that you wouldn't expect. Playing football just teaches you so much about yourself.



Bristol City reign supreme

By Peter Mann



Bristol City have returned to the Women's Super League and are replaced by relegated Reading, whilst Coventry United (now known as Rugby Borough) have been relegated to the National League Southern Premier to be replaced by the returning Watford.

It would boil down to the last for the two newcomers to the Championship, Watford defeating Nottingham Forest in the last play-off, between National League North, and South winners, Poppy Wilson netting the only goal of the game there.

Meanwhile Reading, they were relegated on the final day of the WSL season, losing 3-0 to champions Chelsea, as Leicester beat Brighton 1-0 to secure their safety; the Royals will look to bounce back at the first attempt but will need a major confidence-boost over the summer after a season which saw them collect just three wins and two draws from their 22 games played.

Fronted by club legend, Kelly Chambers, the Royals are one of nine sides to have lifted the Championship and will look to become the first side to have won it twice – both they, and Sunderland, are, at present, the only sides that can become two-time champions.

It has been a steady decline for Chamber's side however, she having captained the club in a love affair which began, in the first team, back in 2007, having come through the ranks there.

Promotion from the Championship, in 2015 had, in the early days in the top division seen them finish in the top half of the table, soon saw the decline in recent seasons; fourth in 2018 was followed by back-to-back fifth place finishes, before slipping to seventh, and eighth, then twelfth, and relegation, last time around.

During their time in the top flight the Royals have also been Vitality Women's FA Cup

semi-finalists in 2019 (losing to West Ham United on penalties) and quarter-finalists this past season (losing 3-1 to Chelsea) – it all became too much for them in the end.

For Chambers, speaking before the defeat to Chelsea in the last game of the season, she said: "Financially, we cannot compete.

"We saw what Tottenham could afford to do, being able to recruit a sensational talent in Bethany England.

"Even Leicester, the players they were able to bring in January, and arguably it's those few additions which has helped them pick up as many points as they have. It's not bitterness, it's just the realistic position we're in.

"Since getting into this league, we've always prided ourselves in our coaching, making the most of our recruitment, and when we bring someone to the club giving them absolutely

everything we have to make them the very best they can be.”

Promoted into the Championship is that of Damon Lathrope’s Southern Premier Division winners, Watford, the Golden Girls having won their division, on the last day of the season, on goal difference, before edging Forest, who’d only just beaten them in a classic, National League Cup final, in the play-off.

Watford have Championship experience, but will be aiming for a short-term stay and would love to go for back-to-back promotions, especially as they’ll look to avenge their last relegation from the division, when they lost with the last kick of the last game of the 2021/22 season, against Coventry United.

Lathrope’s side, known as ‘The Golden Girls,’ claimed that Southern Premier title, on goal-difference, beating Billericay Town 3-0, as rivals Ipswich Town could only manage a 1-0 win at home to Oxford United – goals for the Golden Girls coming from their star players in Wilson, Bianca Baptitste, and Gemma Davison.

Speaking of Watford stars, one players departure they’ll need to fill, fast, will be the void left by the new-retired, Helen Ward, the Wales international now having hung up her boots at the



end of the season just finished.

Having won over a hundred international caps for her country, dating back to 2007, Ward’s club career began at Watford when joining them aged nine, progressing to become captain; spells at Arsenal, Chelsea, Reading, and Yeovil Town soon followed before returning home in 2017, having a brief spell at the London Bees in 2021.

Meanwhile, they’ve already announced numerous departures including the likes of Georgie Ferguson, Faye Brough and Adekita Fatuga-Dada, Lathrope saying recently that: “It’s the least the group deserves, and I’m delighted for them.

“We all genuinely believed we’d do it – I told them before we left the training ground that we were ready and that

the prep has been going on for 10 months – and they’ve gone out there and got the job done.

“I can’t praise them highly enough. They work all day, they come into training in the evening, and the way they work and dedicate themselves is outstanding.

“I think their strength in mentality has arguably been the biggest shift. We can’t forget the heartache of relegation last season – that’s the sort of thing that leaves scars – and they’ve shown huge courage to go again.”

The end-of-season awards in the Championship have also been handed out recently as title-winning manager, Lauren Smith, of Bristol City,

took home the Manager of the Year, and Birmingham City's Jade Pennock was awarded the Player of the Season.

The Golden Boot was shared between Charlton Athletic's Melissa Johnson, and London City Lionesses' Sarah Ewens, the pair having bagged 12 goals apiece throughout the season, with the goal of the season going to Lewes' Ellie Morgan, for her effort against Sheffield United, and Save of the Season to Durham's Naoisha McAloon, for her stop in the game with Crystal Palace.

In leading Bristol back to the WSL, Lauren Smith's side posted an impressive, title-winning record of 15 wins, and 3 draws, from their twenty-two outings, scoring 39 times, and conceding just a dozen, Shania Hayles, who finished joint-second in the leading goal-scorers charts, bagging 11 goals along the way.

Hayles would be joined in the scoring charts by the Player of the Year, Jade Pennock, she having played in all 22 of the Blues' games, adding four assists to her 11 goals; meanwhile Lewes' Ellie Mason, with the best goal in the Championship when against

Sheffield United, back in early March, following a beautiful ball from a teammate with the outside of the right foot, she beat the offside trap, controlled the ball well, and clinically finished with her left foot, the goal beating off some spectacular efforts.

The line-up for the 2023/24 Championship season is now confirmed as being - Birmingham City, Blackburn Rovers, Charlton Athletic, Crystal Palace, Durham, Lewes, London City Lionesses, Reading, Sheffield United, Southampton, Sunderland, and Watford.



CHAMPIONSHIP NEWS DESK



Williams joins Crystal Palace

Crystal Palace have appointed Grace Williams as their new Head of Women's Football. She joins from Bristol City where she had served as General Manager, concluding with the Robins winning the 2022/23 Women's Championship and promotion back to the Women's Super League. Williams previous work includes contributing to re-shaping the domestic game in Wales and a stint as General Manager of Watford. Upon joining the Eagles, Williams said: "The conversations with Steve and Dougie have been really exciting, with their commitment to the team and what we can create together."

Brunton announces retirement

Charlton Athletic have announced that Lauren Brunton has retired from professional football. The 30-year-old rose through the ranks of Luton Town before joining Arsenal's academy, making her senior debut for the Gunners in 2008. In 2013, Brunton moved to Reading where she spent eight seasons and made over 100 appearances for the Royals. She joined Charlton in 2021 and has been club captain for the 2022/23 campaign. Brunton said: "Football has been my whole life for so long. I've been very fortunate to be able to play alongside so many amazing players and staff and I leave with many memories."



Birmingham update about ownership

Birmingham City have released a statement about what their ongoing takeover means for the women's team. The statement said: The Barclays Women's Super League and Barclays Women's Championship Board have approved Shelby Companies Limited's acquisition of Birmingham City Women Football Club Limited. This is part of Shelby Companies Limited's proposed acquisition of 45% of the Club, as approved by the English Football League (EFL) and subject to approval in accordance with the rules of the Hong Kong Stock Exchange.





THE FA NATIONAL LEAGUE

Hull Sports Dinner



Hull's first sportswomen's event will be hosted by Hull City Ladies Football Club at Sewell Group Craven Park on Saturday, 24th June.

A special evening is planned with guest speakers: former England captain Carol Thomas BEM, current Lioness Star Jess Park and former rugby league player Danika Priim.

Carol Thomas will share her inspiring story, being the first England player to have 50 caps, captaining her country to a Euro Final and being awarded the British Empire Medal (BEM) and Honorary Freedom of Hull.

Jess Park's story takes us from growing up in Brough and playing for Elloughton Blackburn Swifts in the boys' under 7s team to winning the FA Women's Cup with Manchester City and playing for England Women.

As the voice of Rugby League World Cup coverage seven years ago, Danika Priim had to pay to play for England. It cost her £300

to represent her country's women's rugby league team in an international match in France. Two years later, she had to take five weeks unpaid leave from her job as a teacher in Leeds to play for her country in a World Cup.

Danika has won every major honour in the domestic game, earned international honours for England, and represented her country in a Rugby League World Cup.

Other entertainment on the night includes music by Peter James Foster and magic from Kerry Scolah, caricaturist Ray Allen and Rob Chadwick will comper the night.

The Managing Director of Hull City Ladies explains:

"This event is the first of its kind in the area and will be run by Hull City Ladies FC and the fantastic Hull City Ladies Supporters Committee.

"We are excited to shine a spotlight on the women's game, and our speakers are guaranteed to

to inspire and motivate guests with their stories about their sport.

"Sponsorship opportunities are available for organisations which come with fantastic benefits.

"We'd love to hear from anyone who would like to sponsor the evening and get behind the team.

"The season ended well for us, with lots of positivity and excellent gameplay, so now is the time to show your support."

Tickets include a 3-course meal and cost £400 per table.





Stourbridge
FC





TENACIOUS DEASY DANCE

Stourbridge striker and serial Golden Boot winner Niamh Deasy is a diamond in the rough and tumble of the National League. She's a classic number 9 who has gone up an astonishing three tiers within the league in two seasons.

Words: Helen Jerome

Photos: Focus Dunn Sports Photography

First moving from her hometown club Sutton Coldfield to Stourbridge in Division One Midlands, then helping her new club secure promotion to the Northern Premier as champions, as their top goalscorer with 25 goals in all competitions.

Meanwhile, she did a degree at the University of Wolverhampton, a Masters in Education, and became the full-time Vocational Lead of PE at the Q3 Academy, Langley. So like most National League players she juggles work, training and playing – and she's just got home after a school cup final when she talks to me about the unusual secret of her success...

When did you first get into football properly?

It wasn't until I was 17 that I really got into playing.

Hang on, what made you wait until you were 17?

I always loved football – my family are all big Aston Villa fans – but I only played on Tuesdays, which was my one night off from Irish dancing. By then I'd become a bit too old, plus it was hard to manage the training of dancing with my A-levels. And I wasn't enjoying it as much. So my mum allowed me to go to football training with a friend from school and I played in a white T-shirt and a pair of shorts, and they said: where does your friend play? And my friend said: just in the park. It was like a scene from 'Bend it Like Beckham'.

Rewind a little... did you wear the full Irish dancing gear?

Oh yes, I had the full wig and outfit and everything. My mum would take me to Belfast every year and I would wear that dress for six or seven competitions. To be honest, I think that's what made me fit, going from that level and intensity. Football is very intense, though it's a different type of fitness.

Dancing is all lower-body stuff, so having strong legs and quick feet has helped me a lot in football. Oh, and that's why I wear so much tan and make up!

So what happened next?

I started playing for Coleshill and really enjoyed it. After my first season there, Burton Albion came in for me, and they were playing at St George's Park at the time. So my mum and dad became totally committed to football then, and they'd take



me up to St George's on the days I didn't train at Coleshill. I'd play for Coleshill on a Saturday, then play for Burton Albion on a Sunday. From then I started University and played there, and it all kind of evolved from that.

When you score goals your name gets around, so that's when I thought I'd take it a bit more seriously. Going from being so fit from Irish dancing to having a bit of a wobble after university, I got to an age where I needed to be fit and that was the right thing to do, to make sure I was playing football at a decent level, so I could train often and stay fit.

Can you pick out a goal or two you're especially

proud of this season?

I scored a few hat-tricks – and away at Long Eaton, I scored three in ten minutes. Left foot, right foot and header! The perfect hat-trick.

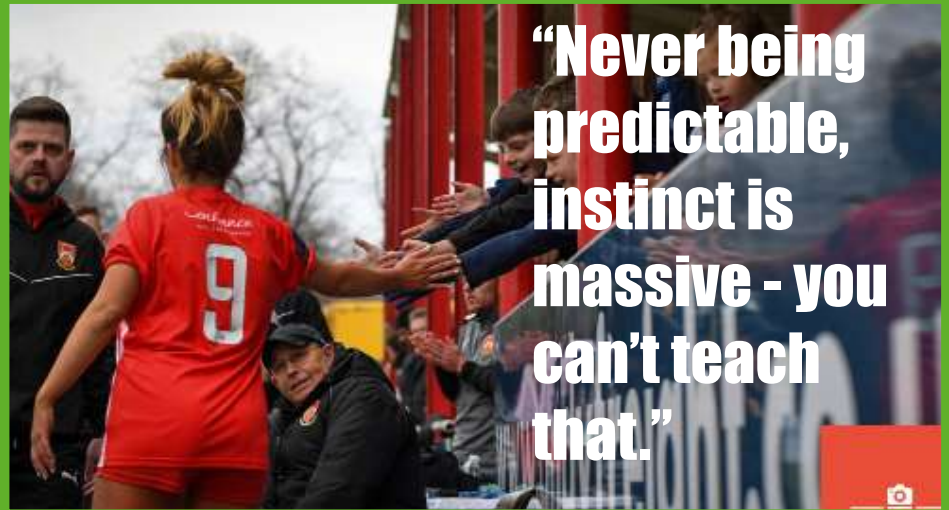
Tell us about the art of goal-scoring – what makes a good striker?

Being strong and powerful and able to hold the ball up, allowing people to come into play. Spinning off and running on instinct – and being in the right place at the right time. Never being predictable, instinct is massive and the coach at Sutton Coldfield says you can't coach that. You just know to run in that position, to be at this point at this time. That's what's really helped me to win these golden boot awards.

Bravery too, I think, which comes from confidence. I remember playing for Coleshill, I think I scored something ridiculous like 100 goals in 36 games. And I've just brought that confidence with me everywhere. So I wish I'd done this earlier, instead of starting when I was 17.

How closely linked are Stourbridge men's and women's teams – and the younger players?

We train at different times on different days. But it's a very close unit there, which is good for us because it shows the trust that the chairman has in the women's side. He backs both of us and it's really successful.



“Never being predictable, instinct is massive - you can’t teach that.”

I remember when I first joined Stourbridge they said to me: it’s one massive group at training, and I said: what do you mean? They said: it’s the first team, the reserves and the under-18 teams. We all train together, that’s the pathway. So we play 11-a-side’s at training and you get the best out of us that way. On Thursdays the younger girls train before us, then the under-18s, reserves and ourselves train together. There’s loads of people that are coming up through the pathway. They invest a lot into it and there’s definitely good things to come from it.

How does it feel to see your previous club Sutton

Coldfield also promoted?

That was nice for the people who are still there. The manager, Andy Burman, gave it his all and we couldn’t get there. We had Covid, we couldn’t play, then Leek Town went up on points... however it was worked out. Which meant we stayed down again. Then we came up against Lichfield and Stourbridge to win the league; we had all kind of beaten each other, but Stourbridge were the better side in the end, and thoroughly deserved it.

Me and Sophie Levick left to join Stourbridge – it was a tough decision, but I knew I wanted to do it for myself. It was time to be a bit selfish. I’d already had an offer from Wolves in that

season, and I’d said no to it; I want to win the league with Sutton, then it never happened. I was top goalscorer and Sophie was second top goalscorer – and we both jumped ship, so to see Sutton still be successful is nice.

Turning down Wolves must’ve been a big decision?

Yes. I had plantar fasciitis in both of my heels at the time, and it was mid-season, and I thought to myself it would be nice to be selfish and to go, but I’d rather finish off the season with Sutton and see if we can win the league, and if not hope that the offer was still there after. But I got an offer from Stourbridge instead.

You’ve had a taste of the Northern



Premier League, playing against Wolves in the Birmingham County Women's Cup Final at Molineux, do you know much about them?

I played with Jade and Emma Cross at University, they were fantastic, and they're now at Wolves. They are twins, very good, very deceiving; they're tiny but they're brilliant. It's a shame that Wolves didn't go up this year, I think they deserved it. But it just goes to show you what it's all about.

How high do your own ambitions go – Championship, even the WSL?

I'd love to and whenever I think that, I wish I was like some of the other girls and been about five or six years younger. I'm totally committed to training three or four times a week, and balancing that with work would be difficult, but when I look back

at what I used to do dancing wise it's the same sort of commitment. I'd love to give it a go and be successful at Tier 3, then see where it takes us after that.

There's no reason not to; you're just one tier below now. Absolutely, only it's scary when you think of it like that!

Has anyone tapped you up, now you keep winning all these Golden Boots?

Not yet, I think it's from 1st June when they can contact us. They're not allowed to do it before then. We'll have to see, but I'm happy where I am and I want to challenge myself to give it a go.

How do you cope with working full time – being part-time?

It took a lot of getting used to. I leave the house here in Sutton Coldfield at about 5.15 in the morning, and when I train twice a week with Stourbridge I get home at 10.30 in the evening. Because my school work is halfway between here and Stourbridge, there's no point in me coming home. So I stay at work till six and go to Costa and Starbucks and do a bit more work, then carry on to football.

It's draining, but you get the rewards on a Sunday. The whole day out with the girls is brilliant and obviously we've been winning and had a really successful

season. So it's been worth it. I just hope it's the same this year.

Do you see that changing, and the National League going full-time?

I think with how women's football is perceived now by a lot of people, it's got a lot more value to it, so it wouldn't surprise me if that was the case. And if it did, that would be brilliant for everyone involved.

I know you teach PE, presumably much more than just football?

Yes, I teach all sports. Anything from softball, cricket, rounders to handball, netball, anything really. And I also lead on anything vocational, so BTEC, I teach health and social care, I'm in charge of business, travel and tourism, child development and performing arts. That's why I have to get in for six every morning!

Ever since I was little in primary school I always wanted to be a PE teacher, always loved sport, and I'm thankfully one of those people who can take to any sport. Some of the lads at work get really frustrated, maybe see me play cricket and ask: how are you so good at that? I think it's just that natural tendency to be able to throw, catch, kick a ball. I tend to be quite good at everything.

Will you do your coaching badges?

I don't think so. I've got a lot of experience in coaching students aged 11 to 16. I'm very



career-driven, in that I put a lot of time into my work life. I spent six years at university between my degree, my teaching degree, then a Masters in Education. I prefer playing, to be honest! And being a player manager doesn't appeal to me.

Is there a trickle down in girls playing post-Euros?

Yes, it's massive at the club. Plus the amount of football available for girls in schools now, the amount of fixtures... I was at a cup final tonight with the boys in year eight, and the opposition had a girl in goal and the lads said: oh my god, they've got a girl in goal, but I absolutely loved that.

What about fans?

A couple of weeks ago we played away at Solihull Moors and I noticed a student with her dad – someone you'd struggle to get to participate in PE, a quite demotivated student – and she was there supporting me with her phone out taking pictures. So it was quite special. And other kids come down from school, even though Stourbridge is a good half an hour outside the area from where I work. But there's girls there watching and it's great to see – plus girls come up to me to ask if there's a football team they can play for.

Also a lot of the lads at Stourbridge are massive women's football fans, and they have

season tickets at United. They always go and watch the women. So I hear all the news about the Women's Super League.

What do you think about being a role model?

I think it's great and it feels so good, seeing the girls and the young lads that come to the War Memorial to watch us in our home games. Even little kids travel with us now on the coach to away games, singing songs about us, and it makes you feel like you're doing something good. Especially being a teacher as well, and a PE teacher, we obviously aspire to inspire people to take up any sport and be active. And doing that myself outside of work goes a long way.

Our headteacher is wicked and obsessed with football and he's forever shouting me out to the kids, sharing posts on social media, and you get a lot more respect from the kids as well. They're a lot more interested in it. I'll go in on a Monday and they ask: how did you get on yesterday, miss? It's wicked to see that and I think it's really important.

Tell me about your own female role models – now and in the past?

When I started, I wouldn't say I had any in football. Though in terms of athletes, Jessica Ennis Hill is one of my favourites. Then at university, my manager was Jemma Connor-Iommi, who

played for London Bees. She said to me: get yourself fit, Niamh, and you'll make it, you'll make something of yourself. I think without having someone being so honest with me at that age, I probably would've taken it as a bit of a fun thing to do. Whereas I actually thought, I could take this seriously if I'm quite good at it. So Jemma was very inspiring in my younger years.



Right now, one of my favourite people in women's football is our captain at Stourbridge, Amber Lawrence. She played for years, had a baby, came back, smashed the National League, and captained us to win. To see more women like her, doing what they do and still being able to play sport is really inspiring.

Have you played under women managers as well as men?

Only Jemma at University, and that was brilliant, she knew her stuff. Since then just men. And again they're so invested in it. Mike Harris and Andy Fisher at Stourbridge give their life to it and their commitment drives us all to be committed as well. It's great having men in there, but it would be great to see more women involved.

Should there be more women managing women's teams?

Yes, absolutely. There should be more opportunities for women, and I know it's growing. With more women involved, more girls are likely to play. Gee Thacker at Stourbridge is the reserves team manager, and seeing her go through her badges and be successful is brilliant. It's inspiring for younger girls too, who want to go into that coaching route and do it at college or university. Someone like her is massive.

Finally, will you be supporting the Lionesses or Ireland in the World Cup - or both?

A bit of both! Anything to do with Ireland is important in our household, with my mum and dad... And it would be great to see the Lionesses be successful as well. It's nice to see that when they're local, so either or. I want them both to do well. And yes, Katie McCabe is brilliant!



Final ever play-off final

Watford secured an immediate return to the Barclays Women's Championship by beating Nottingham Forest in a close contest.

Forward Poppy Wilson was the hero for the Golden Girls, with the 23-year-old's first-half header ultimately proving the difference between two largely evenly-matched sides who had already been crowned the champions of the Northern and Southern Premier Divisions.

The result sees the Hornets exact revenge on their opponents following their agonising FA WNL Cup final defeat the last time they went up against the Tricky Trees in April, while it also marks a fairy-tale end to Helen Ward's football career as she bows out of the game in style.

Watford suffered heart-break on the last day of the 2021/22 season when they were relegated but have now secured a league title and promotion in Damon Lathrope's



first team in charge.

Speaking to the *Watford Observer* after the game, Lathrope said: "It feels class.

"When you're part of a group that has worked so hard for 12 months, giving everything you've got, to then have this moment. It's class.

"You don't always get what you deserve at the end of things, but we have today. And I really knew we would because the belief within the group was absolutely amazing.

"Before the game I told the players to go out and be really brave. There is no harder time to be brave, be courageous, take the ball under pressure and pass the way we want to than in a game like today.

"Going into the game I was fully confident that we could pass Forest off the pitch, and at times we did.

"The way we play ain't for everyone. Doing what we do won't suit everyone because when the pressure kicks in during the big games, it's so easy to take the safe option.

"But none of our team hide away, they stand up to be counted. That's what they did today."

He added about his opponents: "Forest are a very good team and I feel gutted for them," he said.

"I've been in a similar situations, and they should be going up with us. They've won their league."

The game was the last National League play-off game after the FA announced a shake-up next season.

Going forwards the winners of the National League North and the National League South will be promoted whilst two teams will be relegated from the Championship.

NATIONAL LEAGUE NEWS



Oxford support sours

Over the course of the 2022/23 season, Oxford United Women saw a 40.8% rise in their average attendance. That support played a massive part in the U's going unbeaten at home for another season and demonstrates the interest in Women's football in the County. The highest attendance at Court Place Farm was 526 against Crawley Wasps in March, when Carly Johns and Daisy McLachlan both scored hat-tricks in a 6-1 win.

General Manager Gemma Sims told the official website: "It was a fantastic season at Court Place Farm that has shown the potential for growth. We've got more people in the building and it helps that Liam Gilbert and the team were able to put on such a show. It's been great to see so many new faces come through the door and then come back; we always say once you've got people here to the incredible environment we've created, they'll get hooked. We need that even more next year, and we're already starting to plan for next year to get more of the local community involved."

Buxton leaves Donny

Nick Buxton has announced that he has handed in his resignation as Doncaster Rovers Belles manager. In a statement he said: "I, extremely grateful and honoured that I was given the chance to manage the club but on reflection I have found it hard personally and mentally. And now I feel the time is right to let someone move the club forward, bring in the players they want and start again. I would like to thank most of the players that worked so hard for the club.

Also a massive thank you to my staff for the support you gave me was first class and will be forever grateful. My last thank you is to Russ for all your help and support since coming to the club.

Coventry relocate

Coventry United have announced they are relocating to Rugby and will be known as Rugby Borough FC.

"It's not a decision we've taken lightly. After our recent relegation, we have reflected upon how to move the club forward positively and they share the same values as us."



Pompey go semi-professional

Portsmouth Football Club are delighted to announce that Pompey Women are to be integrated alongside the men's team under the ownership of The Tornante Company.

This is part of a move that will see new investment into the women's team, allowing semi-professional contracts to be offered to players for the first time.

Jane Eisner will become the side's new chair, while outgoing chair Eric Coleborn is to remain as a director.



Norwich silverware

Norwich City Women won their seventh Harrod Sport County Cup title on Friday night, defeating Mulbarton Wanderers 3-0 at Carrow Road.

After a dominant first half, the goals finally arrived in the second half. Ceri Flye got the first before Katie Knights, who starred on the night, and Liv Cook added to the lead and ensured the title would go to the Yellows.





GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL



WINNERS

Coach of the Season

KATIE STEPHENSON, WEST WOKING WOMEN

HONOURABLE MENTION: JENNIFER FLIPPANCE, WANDERERS FOOTBALL CLUB

Player of the Season

NAOMI PAXFORD, BURGHFIELD FC LADIES

Grassroots Volunteer

LUCIE GWILT, ABERYSTWYTH TOWN

Unsung Hero

JOHN TWIGG, MAGHULL FC

Feeling Inspired In Liverpool

Words: Martin Rowe-Willcocks

Photo: Ellie Fox



TWFM recently went along to Liverpool County FA (LCFA) in Sefton to a very special end of season presentation afternoon for the She Inspires League.

The first impression on arriving was this wasn't any ordinary end of season gathering. The room was so full of energy as the assembled teams were all there to celebrate the success of the league as well as their own achievements throughout the season. As the prize winners all headed out onto the club house balcony to take the obligatory selfies, we spoke to Ellie Fox, Football Development Officer (Women and Girls) at LCFA, about the She Inspires Football League.

"I still can't believe the turn out for the event," said Ellie. "It's brilliant to see so many people coming together for Female Football." Ellie explained that the monthly recreational league, hosted at LCFA Sefton on Sundays, launched in October 2018 with just six teams as a race for life football tournament. Open to women aged 18

or above, including beginners and those returning to football after a break, games are played either five or six-a-side, with 24-minute matches consisting of two 12-minute halves.

Having played in the league herself, Ellie now runs it as well as coaching one of the teams. She reflected that from those early days interest has grown steadily, with the number of teams involved doubling in the last year alone. There are now 24 teams involved, which is the most there's ever been, and some clubs are now bringing multiple teams.

She Inspires League Season 22/23 in numbers

24 Players

294 Players

5 Referees

9 Months

576 League Games

101 Cup Games

A key development to the league has been the introduction of ability banding, meaning that

matches are played between teams of similar abilities. This makes the games competitive whilst always helping players develop to the next level. As a fully inclusive league the teams' welcome players from all backgrounds. As a monthly activity it's perfect for those whose busy lives and commitments perhaps prevent them from joining a team with evening training sessions and weekly fixtures. One participant said: "I had an amazing day in what I initially thought was a charity tournament which has since turned into a league. What a brilliant group of girls. It's nice to do something for myself; just a group of footy mums having a go!"

To make the competition open to even more females across Merseyside, Liverpool County FA is also aiming to add a Walking Football division to the league. Well, we were certainly inspired by attending the celebration – and we didn't witness a ball being kicked! If you'd like to know more about the league and its teams, why not contact Ellie on Ellie.Fox@LiverpoolFA.com

“What a brilliant group of girls. It’s nice to do something for myself; just a group of footy mums having a go.”



GRASSROOTS GOSSIP

ALL THE LATEST NEWS FROM WOMEN'S GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL

Wiegman supports grassroots football

Sarina Wiegman announced her squad for the Women's World Cup at grassroots club Boldmere St Michaels. The Football Association (FA) said in a statement that the location of the squad's announcement had been made to "highlight the strong connection between the grassroots game and England teams".

Pitch named after Tooney

EUROs-winning Lioness Ella Toone has unveiled a football pitch named in her honour, as the Government and its Football Foundation partners the Premier League and The FA confirm investment in thousands of grassroots sports facilities to get more people playing sport on quality pitches.

Community football struggles continue

Grassroots girls football clubs are increasingly struggling for survival as the women's game soars in popularity. Rising costs of energy, facilities and insurance are leaving clubs like Actonians LFC in west London with the prospect of some tough decisions ahead.

Grassroots Camp announced

Woodkirk Valley Sports have announced this grassroots football camp with Leeds United. It is for boys and girls age 5-12 on 9-10 August. Kids need to bring shin pads, football boots, water bottles and packed lunch. More details can be found on Leeds United's website.

Amazing Achievements

By Liam McDowell

It's been an impressive season for the Isleham Youth Girls U10s. In only their second season as a team, on Saturday 20 May, they played in the Cambridgeshire League Cup final where they faced Coton at Newmarket Town FC. It was a great day, where the girls had their first experience of a pre-match changing room where we had Seven Nation Army and Crazy Frog blaring out to get everyone in the mood, we were then brought out on the pitch led by our Captain for the day, Eve.

We started well but Coton, a team we have always lost to, got the first goal but the girls kept their heads up. Then with a brilliant rocket from outside the box by Connie we brought the game level. Shortly after, Eve went on a mazy run, taking on a couple of players before firing us into the lead. With us winning 2-1 at Half-Time, the 2nd half was all about concentration and a Player of the Match performance by our Goalkeeper Lexi. Both teams played their hearts out with each team hitting the post on multiple occasions but we held on and after 3 minutes of added-on time, the final whistle went. The crowd went crazy and the entire squad stormed the pitch in jubilation.

The squad were; Hannah, Lexi, Jasmine, Hattie, Connie, Eve, Isabella, Mia, Isla, Lillie, Sienna and Rose, and coached by Graham and Liam.

This is an amazing result for these awesome girls who have worked so hard throughout the season.



TWFM
—THE WOMEN'S FOOTBALL MAGAZINE—

CELEBRATING WOMEN'S FOOTBALL
FROM GRASSROOTS TO THE HOME
NATIONS



Tackling the disparity of physical activity amongst blind and partially sighted people



The UK's leading sight loss charity, Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) and British Blind Sport have joined forces to launch the See Sport Differently campaign, which aims to promote accessible sports and breakdown barriers faced by blind and partially sighted people who want to get active.

According to research by RNIB and British Blind Sport over half of blind and partially sighted people are inactive (do less than 30 minutes of physical activity per week) and one in three said there were sports or fitness activities they would like to try but haven't been able.

To launch the campaign, RNIB and British Blind Sport have released a series of emotive videos which set out the barriers faced by people with sight loss and celebrate their fitness journey by showing how they stay active by taking part in swimming, martial arts and adapted team sports such as Goalball.

In addition, the campaign has created an online hub which provides information and guidance on accessible sports and activities. This portal includes an interactive quiz where people can find out what sports and activities best suit them.

Alice Holloway, Strategic Programme Lead at RNIB said: "See Sport Differently is an exciting and energetic collaboration between two organisations that fiercely champion the lives of blind and partially sighted people.

"Over the last 2 years, we've been working with British Blind Sport to understand the barriers blind and partially sighted people face when they want to get active, and the impact this can have on their motivation to do so. Based on this insight, we've built a programme of activity to tackle the biggest barriers that stop people with sight loss getting involved in sport and activity.

We know there is a lack of awareness about how blind and partially sighted people can get active, as well as a lack of confidence and knowledge in the sporting sector when considering adaptive activities. That's why we're launching our new campaign, to tackle these barriers to participation by raising awareness around the need for more inclusivity in sport and fitness. We will also be working to ensure blind and partially sighted people have access to all the information necessary to find and fall in love with a sport or activity that works best for them."

Alaina MacGregor, Chief Executive of British Blind Sport, said: "Our joint research found that more than half of blind and partially sighted people feel that having sight loss stops them from exercising as much as they would like. The findings emphasise the importance of raising awareness across the sector and ensuring that people who have lost their sight

have access to accessible opportunities that enable them to live healthier and happier lives.

"Our new hub contains a variety of resources, activities and information that can help to remove some of the barriers to participation, provide positive experiences and encourage blind and partially sighted people of all ages and abilities to participate in sport."

The campaign, which is funded by Sport England and National Lottery, is a three-year initiative and has already received support for fitness icon Derrick Errol Evans MBE, widely

known as Mr Motivator, who has created a series of free audibly accessible home workout videos.

"Our new hub contains a variety of resources, activities and information that can help to remove some of the barriers to participation, provide positive experiences and encourage blind and partially sighted people of all ages and abilities to participate in sport."

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as Mr Motivator, who has created a series of free audibly accessible home workout videos.

RNIB and British Blind Sport have received £1m in funding from Sport England to deliver the See Sport Differently initiative. Thanks to the players of the National Lottery, up to £600 million has been made available to support communities throughout the UK during the Coronavirus crisis.

To find out more information about See Sport Differently and watch the full stories visit www.seesportdifferently.org.uk





CUP COMPETITIONS

Crowds breaking records

A record-breaking crowd of 77,390 were at Wembley Stadium connected by EE on Sunday to see the Vitality Women's FA Cup Final between Chelsea and Manchester United.

Smashing the previous attendance record of 49,094 at last year's Final, the 2023 edition went even further with tickets for the clash between the current top two in the Barclays WSL being sold-out well in advance of the game.

And there was a bumper turnout on the day, with Wembley packed to set the new record of highest crowd to watch a women's domestic club fixture anywhere in the world.

"To break the world record is a massive statement and a wonderful marker as to where the women's game has come in this country," said Baroness Sue Campbell, FA director of women's football.

"A lot of credit goes to all of the players and the clubs in the Barclays Women's Super League, the Barclays Women's Championship and below that, but also credit to everybody that's worked at the FA to make sure this is a reality.

"I've said before that we've come

a long way, but we've still got an incredibly long way to go and we know that.

"But it's another marker in the sand that the game in this country is now alive and well, flourishing and growing."

It was a target to sell-out the Women's FA Cup Final in the FA's current four-year strategy for women's football, Inspiring Positive Change, which was set out in October 2020.

And after previously seeing another of those targets of England winning a major tournament secured last summer, Baroness Campbell is now looking to go even further.

"When we set out in our strategy to sell out the Women's FA Cup Final back in 2020, I didn't expect it would happen so soon and it's pretty special to break the world record," she admits.

"I do think this is all part of the continued EURO bounce. What happened when people came to the games, not just the England games but anywhere in the country, they just enjoyed the vibe and the environment so much.

"Everyone had such an incredibly good time and they

realised that what they were watching was world-class football and world-class sport.

"That bounce has just continued and I think people love the experience of coming to Wembley.

"And the players have done an amazing job in terms of their performance so the level of the game now is just increasing year-on-year.

"It speaks volumes on where our competitions leagues have got to. We have to remind ourselves that we only became a full-time professional league in 2018.

"This is still very early days for the professionalisation of the women's game, but it speaks volumes of what's happened and how well the leagues and clubs are doing and the sort of following that the players are starting to get as individuals."

"In the Barclays Women's Super League and Barclays Women's Championship games, even in Tier 3 and 4 and our Women's National League, we've seen much bigger numbers such as Newcastle getting over 22,000 to a game in Tier 4.

"There's a real interest in the women's game and I'm delighted and thrilled."

Sam Kerr shines once again



Sam Kerr was Chelsea's matchwinner yet again as they wrapped up a third successive Women's FA Cup title with victory over Manchester United in front of a world-record domestic crowd at Wembley Stadium.

Kerr, who has netted six goals in the competition this season, fired in a cross from Pernille Harder and celebrated in front of Chelsea supporters with her trademark backflip.

The game had been finely poised until Kerr broke the deadlock despite Manchester United, competing in their first major cup final, being on top for most of the first half.

Marc Skinner's side, who have never defeated Chelsea, imposed themselves early on when Leah Galton had a goal ruled out within 23 seconds of kick-off for offside.

United had an edge after the chaotic start and came close again

when Millie Turner almost stabbed in a loose ball on a free-kick, before Galton sliced Alessia Russo's low cross wide at the near post.

But Chelsea always carried a threat through Lauren James, who looped a header which was expertly tipped on to the post by goalkeeper Mary Earps.

With 77,390 watching on at Wembley - a world record for a women's domestic match - Chelsea began to impose their quality after the break.

Substitute Harder eventually provided the extra quality they needed when she teed up Kerr, ensuring Chelsea became the first side since Arsenal in 2008 to win three Women's FA Cups in a row.

It is their fifth FA Cup crown overall and the latest in a growing list of phenomenal achievements by Emma Hayes' side.

"I'm a football fan. I've watched how much my club has suffered this year with ownership changes, the men's team hasn't been brilliant. Chelsea fans this is for you," Hayes said in her post-match press conference.

"I hope we gave you something you can smile about it this year. The whole club, owners included," she added.

Manchester United manager Marc Skinner said: "To any Manchester United fan listening, I can promise you now [that] we will give everything to keep getting you back into finals and in the Champions League.

"We know how special our club is and how we need to be synonymous with success.

"But along the way, you get a few bumps, and today was one of them."



What a final!



Barcelona have won their second Women's Champions League title after an impressive comeback against Wolfsburg.

Wolfsburg got off to the perfect start when competition top scorer Ewa Pajor robbed the ball off England defender Lucy Bronze, returning after knee surgery in April, to drive in the opener.

Germany international Alexandra Popp was then set-up by Pajor with a teasing cross - the striker making no mistake as she headed in Wolfsburg's second.

The Spanish champions trailed 2-0 at half-time before Patri Guijarro's two-minute brace pulled them level.

Spurred on by their instant response in the second half, Barcelona piled on the pressure and were eventually rewarded.

Fridolina Rolfo got the winner, thumping it into the roof of the net from close range with 20 minutes left.

Barcelona had lacked fluency and patience in the first half but

it was no surprise they bounced back, displaying the quality of football that helped them reach a fourth final in five seasons.

Success for Bronze and Walsh

Among Barcelona's winners were England Lionesses stars' Keira Walsh and Lucy Bronze.

It was Walsh's first Champions League title whilst Bronze became the first woman to win the trophy with two different clubs after picking it up with Lyon three times.

"We made it hard for ourselves in the first half even though we created so many chances," Bronze told Dazn.

"We knew we had enough quality to come back into any game. I don't think we were ever worried about scoring three goals, which is a crazy feat to do, but that's the talent within this team.

"It was definitely difficult at the end having not played for five weeks, but I'm so happy to have played my part for the team."

"It's been a pretty good year with the Euros and the Champions League," added Walsh.

"To play for Barcelona in front of these fans is a special, special feeling. This club gives you that."

Goal of the tournament

Frida Maanum's quarter-final effort for Arsenal against Bayern won the fan vote for goal of the 2022/23 UEFA Women's Champions League season.

The top ten goals of the 2022/23 competition were selected by UEFA's Technical Observer panel, and then put to a vote.

The public poll agreed with the technical panel that Maanum's crucial long-distance strike against Bayern topped the lot

ahead of another knockout goal across London, Caroline Graham Hansen's early stunner in the semis for Barcelona at Chelsea. Another Barcelona goal, by Mapi León against Roma on the same night as Maanum's effort, was third in the poll.

Fans' favourite goal of the 2022/23 UEFA Women's Champions League

1 Frida Maanum (Arsenal 2-0 Bayern) - Quarter-final second leg, 29/03/2023

2 Caroline Graham Hansen (Chelsea 0-1 Barcelona) - Semi-final first leg, 22/04/2023

3 Mapi León (Barcelona 5-1 Roma) - Quarter-final second leg, 29/03/2023

Champions Player of the Season

Aitana Bonmati of Barcelona has been named the 2022/23 Uefa Women's Champions League Player of the Season.

Bonmatí ended a triumphant campaign for her team with five goals and a competition-best eight assists, giving her a total of 13 goal contributions - more than any other player.

Speaking about the award, she said: "Thanks Uefa for

this Award. It's a pleasure to play the Champions League and even more to win it! I want to thank all my teammates, staff & club for making me a better footballer and for everything we are accomplishing. And a big thank you to all the fans around the world that support us."

Lena Oberdorf was named Young Player of the Season.

Champions Team of the Season

Frohms (Wolfsburg)
Bronze (Barcelona)
Paredes (Barcelona)
Leon (Barcelona)
McCabe (Arsenal)
Bonmati (Barcelona)
Oberdorf (Wolfsburg)
Guijarro (Barcelona)
Graham Hansen (Barcelona)
Popp (Wolfsburg)
Pajor (Wolfsburg)



Champions League to move behind Dazn paywall



The majority of Women's Champions League matches will be shown behind a paywall next season, with the broadcaster Dazn believing the time is right to "accelerate the value" of the women's game.

Under Dazn's new pay/freemium model, which was confirmed officially on Monday, 42 of the 61 games will be shown on the company's subscription service, which costs £9.99 a month. But 19 games will remain free on YouTube – including the final, all of the quarter-finals and semi-finals and 12 from across the group stage.

Dazn's global markets chief executive, Veronica Diquattro, said the development was a crucial step in helping to enhance the financial viability of the women's

game. "We have been growing the visibility of the WCL thanks to our partnership with YouTube," she said.

"It has seen millions of streams on our Dazn platform, and also on our YouTube channel with 14 million-plus extra viewers compared to the previous year.

"But now the time is right to convert this visibility into viability and value for the long-term sustainability of the rights.

"Driving the commercial value upwards is how we can make sure there will be future investment in the sport for the benefit of the game and the players. And it's also in the interest of the clubs and Uefa as well."

Dazn owns the global rights of the WCL from 2021 until 2025, and initially decided to stream all 61 games for free on its YouTube channel, which has more than 600,000 subscribers.

Diquattro said she regarded the switch to a different model as the next step in the evolution of women's football.

She also hopes the majority of fans will support the move as it will allow clubs to have more money to invest in the sport and pay players what they deserve.

"We have spoken to Uefa and YouTube and we are all aligned. Because we are fighting for the same results – to accelerate the value of the women's game."





HOME NATIONS

Fantastic Fran

By Clare McEwen



Fran Kirby is one of the best attacking midfielders in the game. Flawless footwork, sublime skills, fantastic finishing: Reading-born Fran was born to play football.

As a young child, she played wherever she could, often with her brother and his friends. She joined Reading's academy at only 7-years-old, making her senior debut at 16.

After some traumatic years, Fran's career took off and in 2012 she was the FA Women's Premier League Southern Division's top scorer with 32 goals in 21 appearances.

Reading were promoted to WSL2 in 2014. Fran helped them finish third with 24 goals in 16 games, ending the season as top scorer. Soon after she signed her first professional contract.

Fran marked her senior England debut in August 2014 with a goal against Sweden. In 2015, she was in the Lionesses squad for the Canada World Cup. She instantly made her mark, scoring the opener in their 2-1 win over Mexico.

She'd caught the attention of Chelsea and joined them in 2015. In October, she scored twice to help Chelsea claim their first WSL title and later that month scored Chelsea's first Champions League goal.

April 2016 saw her score an extra-time winner against Manchester City to take Chelsea to the FA Cup final, but a serious knee injury during international duty ruled her out of the second half of the season. The injury plagued the start of her 2017 too, but she finished the season with six goals after only two starts and three appearances off the sub's bench!

Despite the injury, Fran made it to the 2017 Euros in The Netherlands, helping England reach the semi-finals. Fran was a constant threat in front of goal in 2017-18, scoring 25 times, including one in the FA Cup final. Consequently, she was named in the PFA Team of the Year, was PFA and Football Writers' Association Player of the Year, and made the UEFA Champions League squad of the season.

The story continued with 18

goals in 2018-19, including two back-to-back hat-tricks. She scored her 50th goal for Chelsea in September 2018 and made her 100th appearance for the Blues in October. In November she was diagnosed with pericarditis - a swelling of the lining around the heart - that kept her out of the game for 16 months.

Bouncing back, she scored 25 goals in the 2020-21 season, becoming Chelsea's all-time top goal scorer in December 2020 (taking over from Eniola Aluko on 68). She was Chelsea Women's, PFA Players' and Barclays Women's Super League player of the year, and shortlisted for the Ballon d'Or.

In 2022, Fran helped England win the inaugural Arnold Clark Cup, including a goal in their 3-1 win in the final over Germany. She started all six 2022 Euros games, scoring against Northern Ireland in the group stages, and Sweden in the semi-final.

She was ruled out of the World Cup due to a knee injury. As one of the country's most technically gifted players, she'll be missed this summer.

England Squad Announced for World Cup

By **Jamie Davies**

On May 31st the nation found out who will be representing England at this summer's FIFA Women's World Cup.

As always when it comes to a squad announcement, the build-up feels bigger than the aftermath as so many questions are waiting to be answered. Will Beth England change Sarina Wiegman's mind? Who will replace the injured Leah Williamson?

Just over six weeks away, the Lionesses will kick-off their World Cup campaign against Haiti in Brisbane in hope it's the start of another major tournament success just 12 months after winning the Euros at Wembley Stadium.

Thanks to the growth of the Women's Super League (WSL), the success of last year's European Championship and bigger fan attendances at women's matches – England have no doubt become one of the main power



horses and a new threat towards blocking the dominance of USA winning another World Cup.

What makes England competitive is the depth Wiegman has available around her and we have seen that in many recent England matches. It's quite scary how many starting 11's you can make up with England currently even without the likes of Williamson and Beth Mead who will miss the tournament due to injury.

This is the full 23 player squad Wiegman has gone with for their trip to Australia/New Zealand...

The Squad

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

Defenders: Millie Bright (Chelsea), Lucy Bronze (Barcelona), Jess Carter (Chelsea), Niamh Charles (Chelsea), Alex Greenwood (Manchester City), Esme Morgan (Manchester City), Lotte Wubben-Moy (Arsenal)

Midfielders: Laura Coombs (Manchester City), Jordan Nobbs (Aston Villa), Georgia Stanway (Bayern Munich), Ella Toone (Manchester United), Keira Walsh (Barcelona), Katie Zelem (Manchester United)

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

Who missed out?

Sandy MacIver – A goalkeeper selected by Wiegman in the past but before the date of the squad announcement, the Manchester City goal stopper made it clear on social media that she didn't want to be up for selection for the World Cup. The 24 year old made it clear that she wanted to focus on her football but not at international level, for now at least. Would MacIver had been selected if she hadn't of pulled out? It is hard to look past the

trio selected of Mary Earps, Ellie Roebuck and Hannah Hampton.

Millie Turner – The Manchester United defender was one of the main centre halves for Marc Skinner throughout the season. Turner played all 22 WSL matches last season and helped her side secure the club's first ever Women's Champions League spot for next year. With Williamson out of the picture, Turner's chances looked to be high, but Wiegman favoured Esme Morgan of Manchester City instead it would seem.

Steph Houghton – It just felt as though the veteran defender might have had one final major tournament left in the tank when Williamson's ACL injury was announced. Wiegman has not chosen Houghton at least since before last year's Euros and has clearly moved on from had done better in the league, maybe a top two finish, then Houghton might have had a shot of getting on that plane.

Beth Mead – No big surprise that the Arsenal forward was not named in the squad as Mead has been out of action since November. Wiegman did not want to play a risky game by including the Euro 2022 golden boot winner especially with no sign of match fitness before the tournament. Mead

will be a difficult player to replace when you think of the goals she can provide and the experience that could have been shared with Katie Robinson.

How could they line-up vs Haiti?

Predicted XI: Earps (GK); Bronze (RB), Greenwood (CB), Bright (CB), Carter (LB); Stanway (RM), Walsh (CM), Toone (LM); Hemp (LW), Russo (CF), James (RW).

A very similar starting line-up to the one that beat Brazil on penalties in April's Finalissima at Wembley Stadium.

It is a line-up full of experience but a big opportunity for Chelsea's Lauren James who hopes to convert her 2022/23 form into this summer's World Cup. James didn't really feature at last summer's Euros despite making the squad but now she has become a regular forward under Wiegman.

The main concern looking at this full list of players is back up for the defence if any of the starters were to get injured despite seven being chosen in total. Wubben-Moy is the only centre half back up available if anything happened to Bright or Alex Greenwood.

Bright has had injury setbacks in the last few months so there could be a chance she might not be up

for all seven World Cup games if the Lionesses are to reach their first ever global final.

The call-up for Katie Zelem has been expected as the Manchester United midfielder has been knocking on the door since the New Year. Don't be surprised to see Zelem start from the bench but her organization and set piece deliveries may well be needed deep into the match if a goal is needed.

Another brilliant story is Beth England being reunited with her national teammates after being out of the picture in recent international breaks.

But her brave move to Spurs to get more game time and to produce that brilliant form of 12 goals in 12 WSL appearances deserves a lot of credit. Not having Williamson to lead, Mead to produce the sparks up front, Jill Scott to share that wealth of experience – England will find it challenging without those personas in the changing room and the recent performances against Brazil and Australia show that Wiegman and her coaching staff can't take anything for granted.

SCOTTISH STORIES



SWF Championship Team of the Season

Francesca Millar, Morton
Sophie Aitken, Dryburgh Athletic
Natasha Frew, Livingston
Jess Murphy, Livingston
Morgan Anderson, Rossvale
Angyl Learmonth, Hutchison Vale
Shannon Mulligan, Livingston
Sinead Macleod, Renfrew Ladies
Hannah Gordon, Inverness Caledonian Thistle
Clare Docherty, Ayr United
Ashley Elizabeth, Livingston

Glasgow City triumphed in the 18S Firstpoint USA West Cup derby final.

In a highly anticipated showdown, the FirstPoint USA West Cup Final featured Glasgow City and Glasgow Girls competing for Glasgow crown.

Glasgow City earned a corner with around 28 minutes played, and a well-executed delivery resulted in the first goal of the final as Carson capitalised on a gap in her opposition's defence and tapped the ball into the bottom right corner. Glasgow Girls persisted in their efforts to find an equaliser and his determination paid off however with Cooper finding the back of the net just before half time, equalising the score at 1-1 and setting the stage for an exciting second half.

McGarry managed to break the deadlock, slotting the ball into the bottom right corner, and putting her side back in front. Heads did not go down after this goal, though, as Glasgow Girls continued to fight for a way back into the game. Despite best efforts however, City's Carson was able to double her goal tally and City's lead with an impressive shot from outside the box that sailed over the goalkeeper's head.

The impact of Glasgow City's substitutes became evident, as their fresh legs injected speed and energy into the team. They began to dominate the game as Browning chested the ball down and unleashed a powerful strike into the net, extending their lead to 4-1. The match reached its conclusion with Glasgow City firmly in control. In the closing stages, they delivered a final blow, with Kennedy finding the back of the net to make it 5-1. The final whistle blew, and Glasgow City emerged victorious, securing the FirstPoint 18s West Cup.

Jeanfield Swifts fend off Penicuik Athletic fightback to lift 18S Firstpoint USA East Cup.

Pressure from the Perth side eventually paid off, with Johnstone stepping up to a freekick and unleashing a beautiful strike into the top left corner. With Penicuik pushing for an equaliser, Jeanfield's defence remained resolute, ensuring their 3-2 victory. Despite Penicuik's best efforts and desire to get up the park, in the dying moments of the first half a long ball deflected off a Penicuik player and fell to Scobie, who struck it with power and precision to find the back of the net giving Jeanfield a 2-0 cushion heading into halftime. It was Jeanfield's Smith who created the breakthrough, delivering a ball across the box finding Scobie, who looped it into the back of the net. Penicuik, aiming to replicate their 16s Challenge Cup victory, pushed for a goal. Reid swerved past the Jeanfield defence delivering a shot into the keeper's hands. Eventually, this pressure paid off for Penicuik as Blackie pulled one back and reignite the contest. Penicuik used the momentum and encouragement from the crowd to score again, as Blackie beat the goalkeeper again by calmly slotting the ball into the left corner.

Nations League fixtures



Fixture dates have been confirmed for the Scotland Women's National Team who will face England, Netherlands and Belgium in the inaugural UEFA Women's Nations League.

Pedro Martinez Losa's side will open the campaign away to England on 22 September, followed by a home game against Belgium four days later.

The October window will see a double-header against the Netherlands, whilst we go to Belgium on 1 December and round off the group stages as hosts to England on 5 December.

Fixtures confirmed by UEFA as follows:

England	v	Scotland	-	Friday, 22	September
Scotland	v	Belgium	-	Tuesday, 26	September
Netherlands	v	Scotland	-	Friday, 27	October
Scotland	v	Netherlands	-	Tuesday, 31	October
Belgium	v	Scotland	-	Friday, 1	December
Scotland	v	England	-	Tuesday, 5	December

Match venues, ticket details and kick-off times will be released in due course.



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50th Anniversary of First Cymru Women's Fixture



© Joardeli Photography | Daniela Porcel

Saturday 13 May 2023 marks the 50th anniversary of the first unofficial Cymru Women's fixture, which took place at Stebonheath Park, Llanelli against the Republic of Ireland.

With women's football becoming increasingly popular in Britain during the 1920's, the fact that that it was banned was clearly a sign of a very different time. The ban remained in place until the early 1970's when a Cymru team took to the field in a one-off match against the Republic of Ireland. Gaynor Blackwell and Gloria O'Connell were on target in the 3-2 defeat, but the match was significant in that it started a period of sporadic international fixtures under a number of different coaches and managers.

Unconnected to the FAW at the time, Ida and Danny Driscoll together with Tony and Pat Quelch were key names in the women's game in Wales during that era,

and they played an important role in the team becoming completely independent towards the end of the decade. In July 1978, a team managed by Tony Sully and Billy Davies were even invited to compete at a tournament in Pescara, Italy. However, the appointment of former England international Sylvia Gore as manager in February 1979 brought stability to the side and she remained in charge until April 1989.

The FAW has records of 27 matches taking place between 1973 and 1993, when the official team was formed and played its first fixture against Iceland in Afan Lido. More than 200 matches later, Gemma Grainger is Cymru's third full-time manager, building on the work of predecessors Jarmo Matikainen and Jayne Ludlow. A veteran of more than 125 caps, Jess Fishlock has witnessed more change first-hand than anyone else in the history of the women's game in Wales.

There are many others who have played a vital role over the years in establishing the team of today and it's not possible to name them all. But it is the mutual love and respect between the players of the past and the present that shows the recognition for the part each has played in this incredible and far from finished journey. For them, we say thank you.

Cymru squad v Republic of Ireland (13 May 1973)

Sherryl EVANS, Sandra HUNT, Valerie BEVAN, Michele ADAMS, Jackie PURCHASE, Tina COSATORI, Kay MERRILL, Gaynor BLACKWELL, Gloria O'CONNELL, Gillian BYRON, Sandra BRETAG, Pat GRIFFITHS, Sue JOHNSON, Shelley WINTERS, Marlene MAYER-HUGHES, Mai GRIFFITH, Julie YALE.

Temporary dismissals to be trialled in six grassroots leagues

Next season six grassroots football leagues across Wales will trial Temporary Dismissals, commonly known as 'Sin Bins', in a move to reduce instances of dissent and abuse towards match officials.

During the trial, on-field players will be shown a Blue Card for Dissent and must leave the pitch for a ten-minute period. Sanctions for all offences other than Dissent by on-field players will remain unchanged.

The decision to implement the Temporary Dismissals trial was approved by the Football Association of Wales's Community Game Board following consultation with representatives of the six Welsh Area Associations and discussion with the English Football Association where the system has been in place for several seasons at grassroots level.

The Leagues, Clubs, Coaches, Players, and Referees involved in the trial will receive training on Temporary Dismissals before the start of the 2023/2024 Season.

The FAW will monitor the impact of Temporary Dismissals on instances of dissent and abuse towards match officials throughout the season to determine whether the policy should be rolled out across all grassroots football in Wales.

Noel Mooney, CEO of the FAW said: "Our mission is to make football the most inclusive, accessible and successful sport in all parts of Wales. The Temporary Dismissals trial will help us achieve our aim by encouraging fair and respectful behaviour in grassroots football which will only increase participation and strengthen the game as a whole."



Commenting on the Temporary Dismissals trial, Chairman of the FAW Community Game Board Mark Adams said: "We have an ambitious plan to increase the number of match officials across Wales to service the incredible growth of grassroots football. However, dissent and abuse towards match officials has been identified as a key reason for referees leaving the game. A similar Temporary Dismissals trial period in England saw a 38% reduction in cautions for dissent. By introducing Temporary Dismissals, we hope to reduce dissent and abuse towards match officials and therefore increase the number of referees available to help develop grassroots football in Wales."

The Leagues chosen for the trial:
Central Wales Football League
Gwent Premier League
North Wales Coast East Premier Division
North East Wales Reserve League
Highadmit Projects South Wales Alliance League
Macron West Wales Premier League

Sports Direct Women's Premiership NI



As the Sports Direct women's premiership enters game six it's no surprise that the top two teams are made up of last year's winners Cliftonville ladies and runners up Glentoran women.

Glentoran women are edging it at the top on goal difference as themselves and Cliftonville ladies both have played and won six games each.

The leading goal scorers also represent the top two clubs, as Kerry Beattie (Glentoran women) is now in double figures after grabbing herself a hat-trick, with a tally of 11 as Glentoran dispatched newly promoted Ballymena United with a 9 goal drubbing. Beattie seems to have found her form again after a quiet return to the premiership last season by her standards, only Caitlin McGuinness (Cliftonville ladies) is close to her on 8 goals.

Glentoran, who were just pipped to the title by Cliftonville last season, have added strength and depth to their already strong squad in Demi Vance (Rangers

& Leicester), Ellie Scott (Lisburn Rangers) and Emily Wilson (Crusaders), which certainly seems to be paying off for them as their goals came from six different players against Ballymena. Ballymena seem to be struggling with the pace of the premiership as they have only managed one win in six.

Cliftonville, defending champions, sitting in second place, only addition to their squad was Clare Shaw (St James Swifts) are ticking along nicely after a 3-0 win against Lisburn Ladies, McGuinness grabbing herself a brace in this one. All eyes will be on the top of the table clash at Solitude between Cliftonville and Glentoran on Friday 2 June, the winner of which will surely be favourites to take the title. It could also see an interesting dual between leading goal scorers McGuinness and Beattie for bragging rights.

Sitting in third place, three points behind Cliftonville are Linfield Ladies after an impressive 4-0 win against debutants

Larne Ladies, who have yet to get points on the table, another team who seem to be finding the step up in class difficult. Sienna Leckey, Emily Reid, Carla Devine and Rachel Kerr were all on target for Linfield in this one.

Crusaders Strikers and Sion Swifts who are sitting in fourth and fifth place respectively came face to face, with Sion Swifts taking all three points after a comfortable 3-0 win the end.

Crusaders had a penalty saved which would have made it level after Teegan Lynch opened the scoring for Sion. Cora Chambers and Lauren Haynes added the second and third.

Mid-Ulster ladies who are only in their second season at this level gained their first win of the season against a struggling Derry City side who have yet to put points on the board. Eimear McGarrity and Aimee McClure were on the score sheet for Mid-Ulster.

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INTERNATIONAL TOURNAMENTS

Ireland prelim team named

Words: Helen Rowe-Willcocks

Vera Pauw has named 31 players in her preliminary Ireland World Cup squad

The Republic of Ireland Women's World Cup 2023 squad will be the first ever Republic of Ireland team to participate at a Women's World cup.

Ireland achieved this feat thanks to a 1-0 win over Scotland in a play-off final for one of the last UEFA spots at the tournament.

Ireland are in World Cup Group B with Australia, Nigeria and Canada, their first World Cup fixture is against Costa Rica on July 21 and below is their 31-player provisional team, ahead of announcing their final World Cup squad by July 9.

One positive had been the recent addition of Manchester United defender Aoife Mannion. Mannion had previously represented England at youth level



but, following two ACL injuries, had never made a senior appearance so switched her eligibility.

She is a very accomplished centre-back who will be an important addition to the Republic of Ireland squad – though a late-season knee injury means she is not featured in the preliminary squad, and will be monitored ahead of the final squad submission.

One boost is the return of Leanne Kiernan. She picked up an ankle injury in Liverpool's opening game against Chelsea. Having had surgery, Kiernan is now back in the mix.

Preliminary Squad:
Goalkeepers: Courtney Brosnan (Everton), Grace Moloney (Reading), Megan Walsh (Brighton), Sophie Whitehouse (Lewes)

Defenders: Áine O'Gorman (Shamrock Rovers), Niamh Fahey (Liverpool), Louise Quinn (Birmingham City), Diane Caldwell (Reading), Megan Campbell (Liverpool), Harriet Scott (Birmingham City), Claire

O'Riordan (Celtic), Chloe Mustaki (Bristol City), Hayley Nolan (London City Lionesses), Tara O'Hanlon (Peamount United)

Midfielders: Denise O'Sullivan (North Carolina Courage), Katie McCabe (Arsenal), Ruesha Littlejohn (Aston Villa), Megan Connolly (Brighton), Ciara Grant (Hearts, Jamie Finn (Birmingham City), Lucy Quinn (Birmingham City), Roma McLaughlin (Fortuna Hjörri), Lily Agg (London City Lionesses), Sinead Farrelly (NY/NJ Gotham)

Forwards: Amber Barratt (Turbine Potsdam), Heather Payne (Florida State), Leanne Kiernan (Liverpool), Kyra Carusa (London City Lionesses), Abbie Larkin (Shamrock Rovers), Saoirse Noonan (Durham), Marissa Sheva (Washington Spirit)

Could Germany be the favourites to win the World Cup?

By **Jamie Davies**

Last year's European Championship runners-up may have come up short against England but could they go one better at the World Cup this summer?

Last July 31st was of course a date many of us England fans will remember for the rest of their days when the Lionesses finally got their hands on a major trophy after overcoming Germany in extra time.

A tight battle between the English and the Germans which could have gone either way just showed how close the visitors were from spoiling the Wembley party. But the odd goal from Chloe Kelly was enough for Germany to accept the runners-up medal.

Nearly a year on and those lessons learnt of being more clinical are bound to kick in and maybe



this element is the answer to being a complete team. They may have missed out on the Euros but going a step higher for the World Cup is something to not rule out.

Currently, the holders of the World Cup are United States of America who are down as the favourites to win a third straight World Cup with recent success in 2015 and 2019 (3/1). England are second on the list at 7/2 while Germany are third favourites at 7/1.

Oddschecker would say USA and England have a bigger chance over Germany but is this just down to them both sides having recent trophy liftings? Here are some pointers that might suggest Germany are going all the way down under...

Alex Popp wants redemption!
Minutes before the UEFA Euro

2022 final of England vs Germany was about to take place, the fifth highest goal scorer in Germany's women's national team's history, Alexandra Popp, got injured in the warm-up.

For those spectating inside Wembley Stadium, they didn't notice until the kick-off that Popp had been taken off. Without the existence of Popp up front in a final really dented their chances in finding the net and late change of plan had to come in.

Euro 2022 was a tournament to highlight what Popp can bring the table. The 32 year old was the joint top-scorer of the finals alongside Beth Mead with six goals each.

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Euro 2022 was a tournament to highlight what Popp can bring the table. The 32 year old was the joint top-scorer of the finals alongside Beth Mead with six goals each. However, Mead won the Golden Boot since the Arsenal forward had produced more assists in the six rounds.

There were times in that final that Germany had missed Popp in the box where her contribution could have easily changed the outcome of July 31st.

This season, the VfL Wolfsburg striker has been scoring goals for fun with 16 striking the net in 21 Frauen-Bundesliga matches. She also scored one of the goals for the German club in the recent Women's Champions League but proved to be not enough as Barcelona Femeni turned it around from 0-2 to win the finale on 3-2.

Popp at this summer's tournament will have her as one of the favourites to at least take home the golden boot, but can her frustration of missing the Euro final make her more determined than ever that she can bring her country to first World Cup success since 2007?

Berger doesn't move for anyone

Despite the incredible difficulties of going through thyroid cancer after the diagnosis, not just the once but instead it was twice Ann-Katrin Berger has been diagnosed with the illness. The German goalkeeper has not let it be more than a blip in her training and preparations for upcoming matches for club and country.

The 32 year old has been stone wall solid as Chelsea's number one goalkeeper over the course of the season. Keeping the shots out to help the blues seal another WSL title and also the Women's FA Cup. Berger is an inspiration to many that despite the serious illnesses dragging her back and of course being a

distraction to her football – she has shown to others that you can get over these life threatening illnesses and continue to work in something you're passionate for.

An experienced goalkeeper like Berger could lead the defensive line and make things very difficult for any forwards that are thrown at her.

We all know the Germans are one of the best when it comes to penalty shootouts and we saw a glimpse of what Berger can do if it at all comes to penalties this summer. Berger made a decisive penalty shootout save for Chelsea to beat last year's Champions League winners of Lyon in the quarter-finals.



Schuller in scintillating form
Now starting to reach the prime years of her footballing career, Lea Schuller is looking to be Germany's 1-2 punch combined with Popp up front.

We have seen a mix of starting forwards in Germany's recent qualifiers/friendlies where either Schuller or Popp start up front as the team's main centre forward.

It will be a tough call to make for Germany manager Martina Voss-Tecklenburg to decide which one should start while the other has to watch from the

bench.

But this could also be a silver lining as both players have really shined for their clubs this season.

We mentioned the goal stats for Popp earlier on in this article but now looking at Schuller's, the 25 year old has similar goal returns. 14 goals scored for Bayern Munich in the last 22 matches in the league alone while Schuller also added four in last season's Champions League campaign (10 matches).

One good plan that Voss-Tecklenburg could rely on is switching both strikers round

if their goal scoring form continues. If it comes to having to rest one of the forwards, the manager has that option to substitute them and make the swap especially for example

Popp started the game but got tired at the midway point of the second half – then you get on Schuller who of course right now can find the net in terms of what her form is telling us.

Right there you've got forward depth where Germany could have the clinical finish over the big teams such as USA and England.



Fifpro says players were at risk



Footballers were placed “at risk” during qualifying for next month’s Women’s World Cup in Australia and New Zealand by a lack of medical support and substandard working conditions, according to the global players’ union.

A report by Fifpro involving responses from 362 internationals took an in-depth look at an often fragmented, and badly scheduled, qualification process and reached a damning conclusion.

“During qualification the conditions that the players are exposed to and expected to deliver in are not up to the standards of elite international football, putting both the players and the sport at risk,” said Fifpro in a scathing foreword to the first report of its kind in the women’s game. “Fifpro firmly calls on the industry to take a close look at the qualification processes in each of the six confederations.”

The investigation focused on the continental championships

outside Europe which also served as World Cup qualifiers, and on Euro 2022. It found that about 40% of players did not regard themselves as professional, almost a third had not received payment from their national team and two-thirds had taken unpaid leave or holiday from alternative employment to play in the tournaments.

Given that just over 60 of the respondents competed in Euro 2022, staged in England last summer, Fifpro highlighted the finding that 70% of players surveyed had not received an ECG before the tournaments in question.

Such heart health checks are routine in the men’s game, as are wider medical examinations. However 54% of the female internationals who responded had not undergone a pre-tournament medical, while 39% said they had had no access to mental health support.

In March Fifa announced the

implementation of “equal conditions” for its men’s and women’s World Cups. Although Fifpro acknowledged this represented a “historic and long-awaited step forward” and “an acknowledgment of progress towards equality” it stressed that “the pathways to World Cups require attention”.

Fifpro welcomed Fifa’s decision to pay participation and prize money to players involved in this Women’s World Cup – each winning footballer will receive £217,000 and all those who go out in the group stages get £24,000 – and is urging international football’s governing body to turn its attention to the qualification process.

One of the reports principal conclusions is that Fifa needs to equip the women’s World Cup qualification process “with a more complete regulatory framework”.

Information obtained by The Guardian.

TV Blackout Nearly Over



The BBC and ITV are nearing a deal with FIFA to broadcast the Women's World Cup, according to reports.

The British broadcasting giants are thought to be close to a £7.2-8million (\$9-10m) agreement for the rights to show the upcoming competition, taking place in Australia and New Zealand which is set to start on July 20.

There had been a threat of a broadcasting blackout in Europe's Big Five nations - England, Spain, Italy, Germany, France - following bids of £800,000-£8m (\$1m-\$10m), which Gianni Infantino insisted were unfair.

The reported sum would amount to around five to six per cent of the amount paid for the rights to the recent Men's World Cup in Qatar.

The BBC and ITV reportedly paid a fee closer to £159.1m for the rights to the 2022 edition of the quadrennial international tournament.

No deal has been signed, but those close to the discussions claim that the proposal could allow for agreements with other broadcasters, which could prevent a potential blackout of coverage, as was previously threatened, according to Bloomberg.

FIFA president Infantino had described previous bids from European nations as insulting, given the mammoth sums forked out for the men's tournament.

And while the British broadcasters' bid only comes in at a fraction of the fee for Qatar 2022, it is still higher than equivalents from the continent.

As per Bloomberg, there have been bids totalling as little as one or two per cent of that which was paid to show the men's competition.

Viewing figures for the competition have grown in recent iterations, with the final in France in 2019 watched by over 260m, with overall tournament figures at around 1.1 billion, as per FIFA.

Since that competition, Europe is thought to have accounted for £843.4m (\$1.06bn) in broadcasting rights.

Ticket sales for the 2023 Women's World Cup have exceeded one million, eclipsing the historic mark set in France four years ago.

The forthcoming tournament, hosted in Australia and New Zealand, is set to get underway on July 20 with an expanded format of 32 teams.

Infantino, announced the landmark achievement that he believes signifies a growing interest in women's football.

'Delighted to share with the world that FIFA has passed one million tickets sold for this year's FIFA Women's World Cup,' he wrote in a message posted on Instagram.

'As I write this, 1,032,884 tickets have been sold. This means that with over one month to go before kick-off, we have surpassed the numbers sold for France 2019.'

LOOKING AT THE BIGGEST DISCUSSIONS IN THE GAME

Should WSL teams play every game in the men's stadium?

A question that has split the WSL and footballing community down the middle as of late: should WSL teams be relocated and play all of their games in the men's stadiums? Abbie Smith spoke to superfans around the country to find out what they really think.

YES

Jas

23 - Arsenal supporter

Favourite player: Leah Williamson

Jas says: 'I am mostly for the women playing in the men's stadium as it allows for more equal opportunities for the women's game and it allows for more fans to be able to watch the games. In contrast to this, the smaller pitches allow for players to be closer to the action and they have a more intimate experience with the players during/ after the games. Overall, I do think that the women moving to bigger stadiums is a positive as it shows that there is a huge interest for the women's game.'

Milena

22 - Manchester City supporter

Favourite player: Lauren Hemp

Milena says: 'I think that they should play in the Premier League-standard stadiums as with the rise of women's football comes many more fans that want the chance to watch their team play live. WSL teams are just as good as, if not better, than Premier League teams and the players deserve to play in facilities that represent their talent and bring the game to an even bigger stage.'

NO

Lauren

18 - Manchester City supporter

Lauren says: 'I don't think that WSL teams should play in the men's stadiums, I think that their stadiums should get an upgrade. They deserve their own stadiums to play in that can hold more fans and create more of an atmosphere. Playing in the men's stadiums might not be as motivating and can bring a lot of negative attention, through no fault of the players, so having their own stadiums with increased capacity would be a much more suitable option.'

Daisy

25 - Leicester City supporter

Favourite player: Kirstie Levell

Daisy says: 'Whilst this would be an amazing opportunity for larger teams, it might not go as well for smaller teams or those battling relegation. Having WSL games played at WSL stadiums, ones that the teams have called home for so long feels much better as it feels like a space that fans can also call their own, not one that is shared and can cause the team to live in the shadows. Either way, I just want our WSL teams to flourish and succeed.'



AROUND
THE WORLD

Bay FC to join NWSL



Already into double figures this campaign, news recently broke that, in 2024, the National Women's Soccer League will see its newest franchise team take its place at America's top table, California's San Francisco Bay area the home of the up-and-coming, Bay FC.

Having been founded at the start of April, this year, and fronted by global investors, Sixth Street Partners CEO, Alan Waxman, alongside American sports broadcaster and former footballer, Aly 'Alyson' Wagner, Bay FC will be the first franchise the Bay has seen in more than a decade.

Twice since the turn of the millennium the Bay have seen women's football clubs, the first, San Jose CyberRays, participating in the Women's United Soccer Association between 2001 and 2003, whilst FC Gold Pride, lasting a similar period, played in the Women's Professional Soccer League between 2008 and 2010.

Times have changed quite a

bit since then and Bay FC will look to establish themselves in what is both a strong, and ultra-competitive league, alongside a returning franchise, in Utah Royals, which will take the league up to 14 teams, whilst aiming to add two more by 2026.

Speaking of what the club means, ahead of its entry into the NWSL, co-founder and co-chair, Aly Wagner, said: "Bay FC will be a uniting force, building a culture of belonging and shared pride.

"We will be a beacon of hope and connection, welcoming and embracing people of all backgrounds. While community is our foundation, our love of football is our reason for being.

"Bay FC will have the fire to be the best, and we will show up every day with intensity, competitiveness, passion, and a drive to win."

Co-chair, Alan Waxman, whose Sixth Street Partners will provide investment said to be the largest in a women's professional sports franchise, added: "If anyone knows how to turn a big idea into a world-changing reality, it is the Bay Area.

"With the right investment, care, and culture, Bay FC will become as strong and dynamic as the incredible community of people it serves.

"We're going to activate every muscle from across this region to drive this franchise toward setting new standards of excellence.

"This is the beginning of the Bay FC generation, and it is going to be powerful." Alongside the official announcement of the clubs' arrival in the NWSL, they also released their logo, and strip, for the new-look franchise – a logo that takes the shape of a gothic-style, B, drawing inspiration from that of the Golden Gate Bridge, and the area's stunning, street art scene.

Strip-wise, Bay FC will play in a blue and warm red home kit, representing that of the Bay and Poppy respectively, and a dual-shade of grey away strip, in fog grey and steel.

Waxman and Wagner were joined by Wagner's US Women's National Team, for whom she earned more than 130 caps, legends Brandi Chastain, Danielle Slaton, and Leslie Osborne, they completing a star-studded partnership.

As for where they'll play, the club teased recently two stadia, in San Francisco's Kezar Stadium, and San Jose's PayPal Park, home of San Francisco City FC, and San Jose Earthquakes, respectively, announcement for which will be made in the near future.

Anderlecht continue streak



By Peter Mann

There's been a many a successful club, player, in the world of football, the beautiful game often churning out a shining light, and, in the Balkan country of Romania, home-grown international, Ștefania Vătafu continues to glow.

Now in Anderlecht, the home of the ten-time Belgian champions, RSC Anderlecht Féminin, Vătafu, a 29-year-old central midfielder, has extended her stay another two years, she having joined the Purple and White back in 2018.

Winning trophies, it seems to be the norm for the Romanian, winning six league titles in her homeland, with Olimpia Cluj, alongside a handful of Cupa României (Romanian Women's Cup), even tasting UEFA Women's Champion's League football with them.

A move to Belgium soon came the way of Vătafu, and the honours, they continued to roll, Anderlecht winning their sixth Super League Vrouwenvoetbal championship in a row this

past season (2018-23), also adding a Belgian Women's Cup in 2022, their first in nearly a decade, just for added measure.

Of those six-in-a-row, the Romanian midfielder has been a key component in the last five, taking her own, individual haul, to eleven championships, and nearly as many cup victories, she owning that number ten role with her own, imitable style, and panache.

Recently speaking of her time in Belgium, the passionate midfielder said: "In 2018 I didn't know my teammates and the country very well, but now I really enjoy living here in Brussels and have really got used to it.

"The team has almost become a family for me. I liked the club right away because I like the working conditions.

"We have everything we need. The approach is professional."

Meanwhile, her manager at Anderlecht, and fourth man at the helm in the past

decade, Dave Mattheus (formerly of KAA Gent, where he spent eight seasons), also the clubs' technical director, added of his number ten; "Ștefania Vătafu is a paragon of professionalism who always gives her all and has exceptional qualities.

"She is discreet and does not really stand out except by the way she plays. She talks with her feet.

"She will never knock out a rival five times in a small space, but she is very efficient and above all makes her teammates play better."

Now, with the club having won its sixth successive league championship, surely the time has come for an UEFA Women's Champions League assault, Vătafu and her charges having only progressed from the qualifying rounds, once, in the past five seasons – reaching the Round of 32 in 2020.

Although Anderlecht were second in the regular season, two points behind Oud-Heverlee Leuven, it was roles reversed when it came to the play-offs,

the Belgian giants romping to the title, finishing four points ahead of their championship rivals, with both sides winning their respective, final match, and by handsome margins.

Oud-Heverlee defeated visitors Genk 4-1, whilst Anderlecht, they were busy wrapping up another successful season at Lotto Park with a 5-0 win against KAA Gent, Vătafu netting alongside that of Sarah Wijnants, Michelle Colson, Esther Buabadi, and Allie Thornton.

It was a game that saw the end of an era for the Belgian champions, several of their stars now moving on after the full-time whistle; every cloud though, it has a silver lining, as Mattheus and his team having already announced contract extensions and arrivals.

Goalkeeper Justien Odeurs, who started and finished her career at Anderlecht, has retired from the game, and her replacement has already arrived in the shape of 30-year-old, Swiss international shot-stopper, Seraina Freidli, from FC Zurich; alongside the departure of Odeurs were that of defender, Michelle Colson, midfielder Charlotte Tison, and striker Mariam Toloba.

Those departures though were immediately soothed

by the club announcing that, alongside the arrival of Friedli, young reserves 'keeper, Aude Waldbillig, only born in 2007, has seen her first contract with the club, a two-year deal.

There's also a years' extension for defender Silke Vanwynsberghe, until 2025, whilst striker Lore Jacobs has done the same as the 18-year-old hopes to add to the title-winning haul of 18 goals of this past season, and Esther Buabadi, who scored in the final game of the season stays, along with winger Lola Wajnblum, who's had a lengthy spell on the side-lines following injury in the UEFA Champions League qualifiers last summer, have signed until 2024, Buabadi aiming to better the eight goals and nine assists last season, when they go again for 2023/24.

Before all of that happened however, Anderlecht saw a home favourite return to Lotto Park, Tine De Caigny, the 25-year-old attacking midfielder, and an experienced Belgian international, played for the club between 2017 and 2021, winning four titles, and collecting the 2020 Golden Boot for added measure.

A move to Germany then followed for the player who'll wear the number six jersey, De Caigny joining 1899 Hoffenheim, finishing fifth on both occasions,

playing Champions League football along the way – her signing was announced after the Belgians were crowned champions

The club itself dates back to the early 1970s, then known as Brussels Dames 71 (the year they were formed); 1987 would see them lift their first league championship, also adding four Belgian Cup victories (1984, 1985, 1987, 1991) during what was a relatively successful, early period for the club – they'd also be runners-up to Standard Liege in 1989 and 1990.

Renamed Anderlecht in the early 1990s, the clubs' most successful period came in the second half of the decade, lifting three league titles, four Belgian Cup's, three Belgian Supercups, and a pair of Menton Tournament titles, an annual, international friendly competition running from 1973.

The next step for Dava Mattheus and his side however, has to be Champions League success, no matter what that may be; a quarter-final slot would be a good start, then, whatever happens, happens.

News from Around the World

Barnes breaks NWSL record

OL Reign captain Lauren “Lu” Barnes is the first player to make 200 regular season appearances in NWSL history, playing all 90 minutes in the Reign’s 2-1 win over the visiting Kansas City Current on Saturday. During her 11-season tenure with the Reign, Barnes has only missed 14 of the club’s 214 regular season games. The 34-year-old also holds the league record for most games started (196) and minutes played (17,328).



Arkema named Division 1 sponsors

The French Football Federation is pleased to announce that Arkema, a partner of women’s football since 2019, has extended its naming contract with D1 Arkema, the French Division 1 women’s football league, for another three seasons. Official naming sponsor of the elite women’s football championship until 2025, the French group, a major player in specialty materials, has pledged support for women’s football since the 2019 World Cup in France, when it was the national partner.

The logo for Arkema, featuring the word "ARKEMA" in a bold, sans-serif font. The letters "ARKE" are in a dark blue color, and "MA" is in a light green color.

Kerala Blasters statement

The statement said: “It is with a heavy heart that we must announce the temporary pause of our women’s team. This decision has been necessitated by the recent financial sanctions imposed on our club by the football federation. We deeply regret that we cannot continue our women’s team activities until such time that there is complete clarity on the matter. The decision to pause their activities was made after careful consideration and evaluation of the current circumstances.







It's necessary to be
in the now. You
always have to learn
from the experience
and take out the
things it takes to
become better.

SARINA WIEGMAN