

# WOMEN'S FOOTBALL

ISSUE 12   
1 YEAR BIRTHDAY!

MAGAZINE

MAY 2018



# LIONESSES ROAR

- Hear all the latest from Phil Neville and Steph Houghton following their World Cup qualifiers

- Jayne Ludlow discusses Wales' historic draw against England
- We look back one year on from the demise of Notts County Ladies



# Welcome

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# Welcome

Welcome to Issue 12!

WOW we have officially been on the scene for a year! And what a superb year it has been. I would like to thank everyone who takes the time to support and read the magazine - we would be nowhere without you!

We would like to congratulate and commiserate with Manchester City and Chelsea. The performances of both teams in the Champions League was fantastic and everyone involved should be very proud of themselves.

Massive thank you to everyone who got involved in our birthday competition. Clive Bunting was named as the winner in the random prize draw and a Lionesses shirt is on its way to him as we speak.

I cannot believe it has been a year since Notts County folded, the news was such a shock to everyone and Ladys Pies fan Jess Cully takes a look back at the last year without his beloved club - it is a really powerful read.

Hope you are all looking forward to the SSE Women's FA Cup final - whether you are going to the game or watching on tele - ENJOY!

Helen Rowe-Willcocks  
Editor







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# Continental

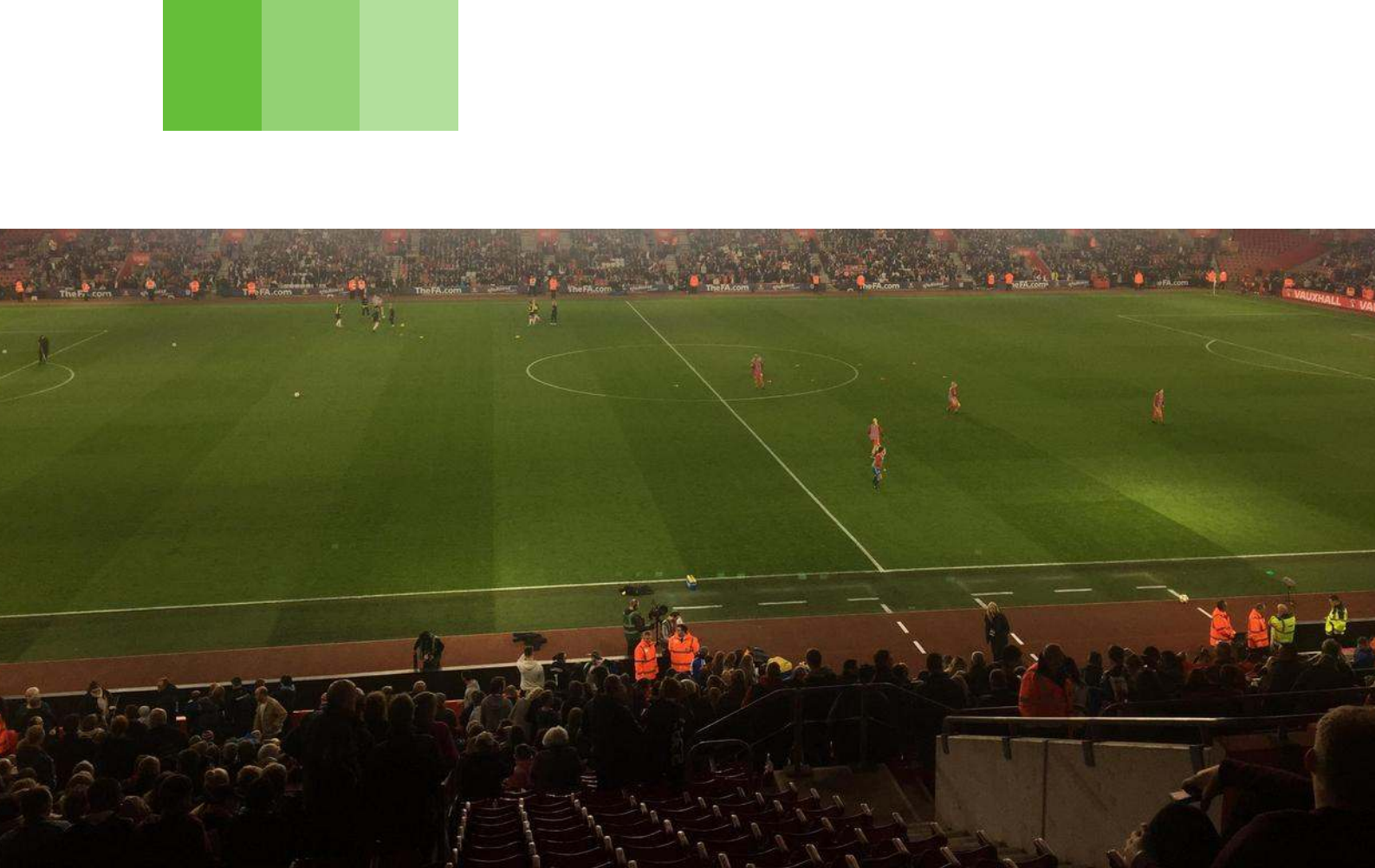


## WSL CONTINENTAL TYRES CUP



# CHAMPION





# About my month

The month started as busy as ever for me as we legged it down to the South Coast after work to get to the England vs Wales game in Southampton.

It was somewhat of a TWFM day out with three members of the team meeting to watch the game. It is great to get together as we all live in different parts of the country so it does not happen very often!

This month we have been lucky enough to welcome a new member to the team. Daniela Porcelli has come on board as a photographer and we feel very lucky that she wants to share her fabulous work with us. There are lots of her photographers used in this issue - including our front page

front page so make sure you check her out on flickr.

[www.flickr.com/photos/joerdeli](http://www.flickr.com/photos/joerdeli)

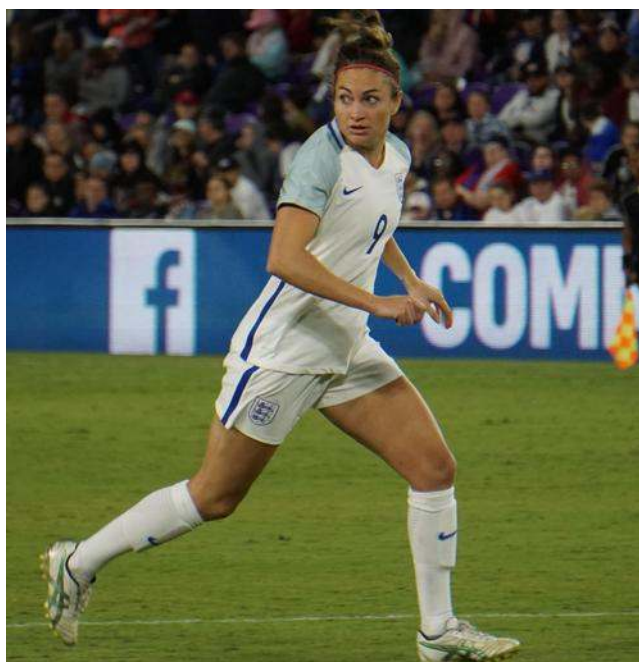
As well as a new member of the team we also have a new section. Our kids section will include games or a quiz, fun interviews with players and a "fan of the month." Fans of the month can be young women's football fans or budding players. If you want to get involved or nominate someone to be in our next issue - then please get in touch on [thewomensfootballmagazine@gmail.com](mailto:thewomensfootballmagazine@gmail.com)

Enjoy the issue!  
Helen



# The Big Match: England vs Wales World Cup qualifier





As the final whistle went, it was Wales who were the happier of the two camps.

Despite chance after chance, player after player, the Lionesses simply could not get the ball in the back of the net. England went into the game firm favourites for the World Cup qualification match at Saint Mary's Stadium but despite an energetic crowd, Wales' high defensive line came out the winner on the night.

More than 25,000 fans were there to cheer on the two teams but the sides shared the points with neither able to find the back of the net.

Wales believed they had opened the scoring after just nine minutes but Natasha Harding's attempt was not deemed to cross the line.

Even though England dominated the game, the Lionesses could not get through a strong Welsh defence.

The second half started much the same as the first – Wales defending heavily.

Despite the lack of possession, Wales kept pressing. There was a clear plan from manager Jayne Ludlow leaving England with little time once the ball was at their feet. Neville brought Jodie Taylor and Nikita Parris off with 35 minutes to go and both replacements – Ellen White and Melissa Lawley made instant impacts.

Within seconds of coming on Lawley crossed a brilliant ball into the box but Houghton's shot skimmed wide of the post. England continued to pile the pressure and Nobbs came close again directly from the corner.

Despite the many chances for England, the moment of the match came in the manner of Phil Neville. With players on both sides giving it their all, a slightly late tackle saw Kayleigh Green stay on the floor with cramp. Without a second's hesitation, Neville went on (with the game stopped) to stretch her leg – a moment which showed his kindness – only be told off by both the fourth official and the referee!

With ten minutes remaining Neville made his final change of the night. Beth Mead entered the field for her Lionesses debut and the 22-year-old showed why she has had so much interest at Arsenal Women so far this season.

Even during injury time, England were still having chances with both Lucy Bronze and Houghton having attempts, but it was not meant to be. The points were shared between the two rivals and it was England who went home feeling like they had been defeated.

Attendance: 25,603





## Phil Neville tells the Women's Football Magazine what he has learnt so far

*Neville spoke to our editor Helen after the match and told us how he was finding the job.*

**PN:** My objective is to make us the best team in the world and to be the best in the world you want to be associated with great players.

The most important thing is to be successful on the field, it then has a spin-off on the field. It's an unbelievable achievement to be second in the world, but for me as coach you get nothing for being second, you want to be the best.

It's been so refreshing the open mindedness of my players and the game, we want to get the game bigger

and better and more global. But ultimately for me, we want to win a World Cup.

If we win a World Cup in 12, 14 months' time, then I think the world is their oyster for the women's game, I really do.

We've just come back from America where the women's game is massive and we've got to make sure that if we win the World Cup – when we win the World Cup – that it takes off as big here. There infrastructure, the facilities, the amount of coaches they've got and participants they've got a grassroots level is incredible and that's the position we've got to get here with the women's game.





## Houghton frustrated with St Mary's stalemate

By Dan Pentland

On a night which will be forever remembered for the performance of 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup qualifying minnows Wales, England captain Steph Houghton spoke with The Women's Football Magazine to give her views on a match watched by over 25,000 fans in Southampton.

England Women's charge towards next summer's FIFA Women's World Cup in France temporarily lost a little momentum in Southampton as Wales Women caused an upset by recording a goalless draw in a Group 1 qualifying match.

Phil Neville's side simply could not break down a stubborn Welsh defensive unit and were largely limited

to shots from range as the opposition continually stuck to their game plan and put their bodies on the line.

After the match, captain Steph Houghton who was disappointed to see her country's three-match winning streak in qualifying come to an end.

"It frustrating for us to come away without three points with all of the possession which we had and the chances which we created" said the defender.

"Full credit to Wales, they came to stop us scoring and they did that. For us we will take the point but we have got to fully focus on the next game."





The match saw Houghton and defensive teammate Abbie McManus harshly booked but she admitted that it is not something which concerns her as it is part and parcel of the game.

"I was disappointed to get a yellow card, I think it was my first one this season" Houghton added.

"Some decisions go for you and some don't so for me it's all about keeping clean sheets at this level."

Barring an early scare for England, Wales sat back and rarely troubled the home defence and Houghton revealed her secret for keeping switched on at the back. She said "People keep themselves switched on in different ways and mine is through talking.

"When you play against teams which bank up and put 11 players behind the ball you know that they are waiting for that one opportunity to counter so it was important that the back four and Keira (Walsh) made sure that we were

locked out and they didn't have any chances.

"The only chance which they had was in the first half from a free-kick and fortunately that didn't go in."

Finally, the defender reserved praise for the crowd with over 25,000 fans attending the match at St Mary's, a huge boost for the women's game.

"We want to have as many people watching us as possible and to have 25,000 at Southampton is fantastic" Houghton said.

"To play in this stadium definitely shows how much the game is growing. "For us, we wanted to put on a performance and come away with three points but it wasn't our night tonight.

"In the next few qualifiers we will make sure that we are in a strong position to be going to a World Cup next year."

*England followed up that goalless draw with Wales by beating Bosnia and Herzegovina 2-0 in Zenica.*

### **World Cup qualifying group table:**

- 1 ENG W P5 w4 D1 L0 Pts 13**
- 2 WALES W P5 W3 D2 L0 Pts 11**
- 3 RUS W P4 W2 D1 L1 Pts 7**
- 4 BOS-HERZ W P5 W1 D0 L4 Pts 3**
- 5 KAZ W P5 W0 D0 L5 Pts 0**

Next world cup qualifier:  
Russia vs England 8th June 2018





# Jayne Ludlow

## "It was Welshness"

J

Jayne Ludlow reflects on a famous night for women's football in Wales as her side battled to a goalless draw with England Women at St Mary's.

Despite topping Group 1 of 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup qualifying with a points return of 10

points from an available 12, nobody gave Wales Women a chance as they prepared to face a star-studded England Women side at St Mary's Stadium in Southampton.

The rank outsiders, who were separated from their opponents by 32 places in the FIFA Women's World Rankings were sure to lose against Phil Neville's ever-evolving Lionesses side in front of over 25,000 fans on the South Coast.

How wrong could we be. Wales turned up and battled heroically for 90 minutes and restricted England to shots from distance while goalkeeper Laura O'Sullivan, who has been playing semi-professional for just four years had an absolute blinder. Ludlow's side drew 0-0 but could even have won it had Lucy Bronze not hacked Natasha Harding's deflected effort off the goal-line after just 10 minutes, a controversial moment which has left the 'Dubious Goals Panel' scratching their heads.

This was Wales' greatest night, a night which proved that anything is possible when you do the basics right. After the match when speaking to The Women's Football Magazine, Wales boss Ludlow could not hide her delight at the result.

"We've worked extremely hard over the last 18 months and we are still very much a developing team" she admitted. "With regard to the effort which they put it tonight and the work ethic, it was Welshness. Coming here was always going to be tough but thankfully, the girls did their jobs."

The result saw Wales frustrate an England side ranked second in the world and Ludlow believes that the goalless draw was her nation's greatest result.

The Wales boss added "From a female football perspective, the result was probably the best. "Any England v Wales game is massive and we did our jobs today, we came here and competed. "We are a very small nation in terms of women's football but when we have everybody fit we are a good team."





With women's football yet to really inspire young girls in Wales, Ludlow hopes that the famous draw with England can help boost interest in the game back home.

"I hope so" the Wales boss said when asked whether the result could help grow the game in Wales. "I hope that it helps push all of our development programmes and gets some interest in the schools environments in Wales.

"For us, it is very much a 10-15 year plan and we have low numbers of kids playing right now. There are great projects underway to try and change that and obviously, we just need time. For us to come out here and get a point is massive."

Wales will host the return fixture at the end of August with a final date and kick-off time yet to be agreed.





Depleted Chelsea record  
impressive win over  
Manchester City to reach  
SSE Women's FA Cup final





FA Women's Super League 1 leaders Chelsea Ladies faced second placed Manchester City Women in the SSE Women's FA Cup semi-final 'Tie of the Round' at Kingsmeadow and we went along to watch the action.

The two heavyweights of the women's game went head-to-head at Kingsmeadow in the semi-finals of the SSE Women's FA Cup as Chelsea Ladies took on Manchester City Women in a game which was tipped to be an absolute thriller. It certainly didn't disappoint.

Chelsea immediately got into their stride with prolific striker Fran Kirby running at the City defence within the very first minute of the match. An explosive start saw Emma Hayes' side take a fourth minute lead when a rare error from Manchester City defender Steph Houghton saw the player fail to deal with a long ball upfield and Kirby nipped in for a free run on goal and an easy finish to beat visiting keeper Ellie Roebuck.

The Blues were almost two goals to the good 12 minutes later but Maren Mjelde's driven effort was cleared off the line by a Manchester City body while Kirby really should have scored soon after but struck her shot across goal.

Nikita Parris was Manchester City's main attacking outlet but the player failed to test Chelsea keeper Hedvig Lindahl during a pretty tame first 45 minutes from the side from the North West. Chelsea always looked like the side most likely to score the second goal of the match and Manchester City goalkeeper Roebuck was lucky not to be punished by Drew Spence after the break following a poor clearance.





It took the visitors 69 minutes to severely test home keeper Lindahl with Georgia Stanway's goal-bound effort from range being tipped wide by the Swedish international stopper.

Chelsea made sure of their passage into the SSE Women's FA Cup final four minutes later when a long punt from Erin Cuthbert cleared Jennifer Beattie and Kirby was again on hand to race away and fire the ball beyond Roebuck into the net despite the best efforts of the chasing Manchester City defenders.

That second hammer blow killed off any threat posed by Nick Cushing's side and Chelsea pretty much cruised their way to Wembley from that point forward.

Speaking to The Women's Football Magazine after the match, Chelsea manager Hayes was pleased to see her side win despite the club having been badly hit with absentees. "We have had a challenging week" said Hayes.

"Some of the players have suffered from some personnel health problems off the pitch, we've had injuries, we've had sickness. It's been a difficult week on return from international camp but we made no excuses. We counted on every member which was in the team and when you are having little reward from the training pitch, you have to be prepared for those big moments. For me, the subs coming into the game and players being drafted into the starting XI, this is a win for them just like it is for the injured players and the missing players."





After seeing his side fall to an impressive brace from Kirby, Manchester City manager Cushing admitted that his side lacked quality in the final third.

Cushing said “I thought we played well, I thought we dominated the ball and we just didn’t create enough chances. Chelsea caught us on two counter attacks and put the ball into the net. About 70% of the game plan worked but we just didn’t create enough chances. We would have liked to have created more clear-cut opportunities but it didn’t happen today. I’m really proud of the players’ performances and I thought what we came here to do we did but we just didn’t get over the line.”









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By Jessica  
Pratt

A

**Arsenal and Chelsea  
defeat North West rivals  
to set up all-London FA  
Cup final at Wembley**

Arsenal and Chelsea booked their places in the 2018 SSE Women's FA Cup final after they overcame Everton and Manchester City respectively in April's semi-finals. The tie will be a repeat of the 2016 final which saw Danielle Carter's first-half goal win it for the Gunners for a record 14th time.

@womensfootiemag





Carter was on the scoresheet once again more recently – in the semi-final with Everton, but Joe Montemurro's side were pegged back as Chloe Kelly's penalty against her former side drew the Toffees level after Dominique Janssen was penalised for a soft foul on Courtney Sweetman-Kirk. Just as the tie looked headed for extra-time in Liverpool, Ireland international Louise Quinn rose high in the 91st minute to meet a corner and head the Gunners to Wembley for their 16th FA Cup final.

Arsenal's opponents were to be decided back in London, where Chelsea and Manchester City were vying for a Final place to keep their corresponding dreams of a league, FA Cup and European treble alive. It was the current WSL leaders Chelsea who took the lead in the first-half at Kingsmeadow, as the in-form Fran Kirby took advantage of a rare mistake from fellow England international and captain Steph Houghton. Houghton misjudged a header which allowed Kirby to latch onto a ball over the top,

race into the box and calmly slot home past the young Ellie Roebuck.

Holders City created little going forward and were punished by Kirby once again in the second half as Jen Beattie made a similar defensive error to the one that led to the first goal. The Scottish centre-half slipped and missed a punt upfield from Erin Cuthbert which allowed the England striker to beat the offside trap, cut in from the right, skilfully sidestep a challenge from Keira Walsh and score her second.

Kirby's expert brace was enough to send Emma Hayes and co to the Wembley final in May; much to the delight of their 3,000 fans at Kingsmeadow. The win also kept alive their dream of finishing the season with three trophies. The Blues could lift their first of the season in early May as they aim for their second victory in the FA Cup against an Arsenal team looking to lift the trophy for the 15th time.

For the first time in the competition's 48-year history, both semi-finals were broadcast live on the BBC and those unable to make it to Wembley will also be able to watch the Final action live on BBC One at 5.30pm on Saturday 5 May.



# Kids Section

Words are either horizontal or vertical – can you find them all?

A	H	E	T	C	L	S	F	R	A	N	K	I	R	B	Y
L	E	M	M	A	H	A	Y	E	S	B	T	H	E	B	N
T	T	H	E	B	L	U	E	S	R	F	H	K	B	P	I
C	N	E	M	W	S	D	J	T	H	E	B	A	H	T	C
H	E	P	O	D	M	S	U	L	L	R	Y	V	X	R	K
E	W	O	L	F	S	B	U	R	G	R	L	D	T	B	C
L	D	F	L	U	C	Y	B	R	O	N	Z	E	C	H	U
S	M	I	M	I	L	L	I	E	B	R	I	G	H	T	S
E	K	E	I	R	P	A	F	D	N	C	Y	J	O	H	H
A	A	U	G	D	T	H	K	U	T	W	C	O	P	E	I
K	K	E	I	R	A	W	A	L	S	H	S	E	Y	C	N
A	G	T	H	Y	K	D	V	I	D	C	P	G	M	I	G
M	A	N	C	H	E	S	T	E	R	C	I	T	Y	T	R
A	F	J	T	D	C	J	L	F	T	S	V	K	Y	I	Y
S	F	L	W	O	F	R	A	J	C	E	J	D	Y	Z	C
T	G	Y	R	J	S	U	C	L	D	Y	S	V	B	E	F
U	D	O	T	Y	U	S	F	U	D	V	B	D	U	N	K
O	P	N	R	Y	H	S	Y	C	K	D	Y	J	E	S	S

Lucy Bronze

Nick Cushing

Emma Hayes

Lyon

Wolfsburg

Manchester City

Chelsea

Fran Kirby

Keira Walsh

Millie Bright

The Blues

The Citizens

## Fan of the Month: Jess Lean

Happy Birthday to Jess who recently celebrated her 12th birthday.

She plays for Blackpool and has been doing a training course with Lancashire FA.





# Quick-fire questions with Lucy Bronze



*Lyon star Lucy Bronze talks to us about her teammates!*

## **Who's the joker in the dressing room?**

Shanice van de Sanden, her jokes are so terrible and ridiculous that everyone just laughs. Sometimes with her, sometimes at her!

## **Who's the dressing room DJ?**

Griedge Mbock Bathy - always dancing, always singing and always in control of the speakers.

## **Who's most likely to become a coach?**

Camille Abily, the most intelligent player I've ever played with.

## **Who speaks the best English?**

After myself and Morgan Brian. Probably Ada Hegerberg, bearing in mind she speaks four languages fluently too.

## **Who's the most skilful?**

Amel Majri is always practising some new skills in training.

## **Who's the toughest tackler?**

None of them, Maybe they'd say me. Or maybe the younger kids.

## **What are your aspirations for club and country in the next few years?**

I think at the club I'm at the aspiration is always going to be winning trophies, and I can strongly say that the same goes for England. Country over everything, and I really want to win the World Cup!





## ELLEN WHITE ANNOUNCED AS FA WSL 1 PLAYER OF THE MONTH

Birmingham City's Ellen White has been selected as the FA WSL 1 Player of the Month for March. White was a vital contributor in her side's unbeaten form this month bagging three goals in two games to take her tally for the season to nine.

The striker scored two close-range goals to ensure victory against Bristol City and then found the net again with a classy chipped goal and an assist as her side cruised to a 4-0 victory over Liverpool.

White had some tough competition from a competitive shortlist including Reading's Lauren Bruton and Arsenal's Sari van Veenendaal. Forward Laura Bruton scored and assisted in her

side's 3-0 win over Yeovil Town and was pivotal in securing a valuable point against table toppers Chelsea. Arsenal's shot stopper van Veenendaal let nothing slip past her this month and has helped in extending their undefeated run to nine.

Presented with the FA WSL 1 Player of the Month award, White said, "I am obviously very pleased to have contributed to our three wins in March, the team has consistently performed well and we have kept three clean sheets. The most memorable moment for me in March was the full time whistle against Sunderland as it meant we had met our goal of winning three matches in a week and coming away with nine points."



## JESS SIGSWORTH ANNOUNCED AS FA WSL 2 PLAYER OF THE MONTH

Doncaster Rovers Belles' Jess Sigsworth has been selected as the FA WSL 2 Player of the Month for March.

Sigsworth ensured her side made it nine league wins in a row in the FA WSL 2 after two impressive performances this month. Netting in both games, Sigsworth maintained her status as leading goal scorer in the division with strikes to defeat both Watford and Tottenham Hotspur as her side maintained the top of the division.

Sigsworth had some tough competition from a competitive shortlist including Brighton & Hove midfielder Chloe Peplow and Aston Villa's Alice Hassall. Peplow has been influential in

midfield this season and helped her side. Full back Alice Hassall was impressive in Aston Villa's 3-0 win over Watford as they ended a run of four straight league defeats.

Presented with the FA WSL 2 Player of the Month award, Sigsworth said, "I'm very happy with how I've performed in March but football is a team sport so without the great squad, staff and the girls in my team putting them on a plate for me every week to score it wouldn't be possible. My most memorable moment last month was my goal against Tottenham but also our team performance against Watford. It was some of the best football we've played all season."





Lucy Bronze volley sinks  
former club City as holders  
Lyon join Wolfsburg in  
Champions League final





By Jessica Pratt  
@redjess14

Manchester City and Chelsea were unable to defeat seasoned European opponents Olympique Lyonnais and Wolfsburg as the French and German champions defeated the English clubs in the two-legged semi-finals to reach the Champions League final in Kyiv.

Lyon, who are on their hunt for their third successive European title, were limited to few chances in the first leg in Manchester as the Citizens did well not to concede an away goal. The 0-0 result gave City hope that an away goal in Lyon could be enough for them to become the first English side to progress to the final since Arsenal in 2007. Unfortunately for Nick Cushing's side, former City defender Lucy Bronze had other ideas and put

Lyon ahead in the first half with a superb volley as the French dominated the return leg in front of 20,000 spectators in Lyon.

Despite City's resolute defending, they failed to pose any attacking threat to Lyon's goal. At the other end, the hosts missed several chances to double their lead but showcased their experience in the competition to see the game out and claim the 1-0 victory; becoming the first team to reach seven finals – in only nine years.

The Citizens, who were knocked out by Lyon at the same stage last year, can take pride in their performances over the two legs as they didn't make it easy for the European giants.





In only their second season in the competition, City have once again made it to the semi-finals and will hope to go one step further next season – perhaps with some new additions to their squad. After being knocked out of the FA Cup by Chelsea earlier in April, City's sole focus is now on beating the west London club to the WSL 1 title.

Chelsea will also have more time to devote to their WSL challenge as they too were knocked out in the semi-finals by the same team that defeated them in all their previous campaigns. Emma Hayes' team were swept aside by the German champions Wolfsburg in their first leg at Kingsmeadow despite a perfect start, as Ji So-yun turned in Fran Kirby's cross inside two minutes. The Germans kept their heads and overturned the deficit with three away goals thanks to Iceland captain Sara Bjork Gunnarsdottir's header, Maren Mjelde's unfortunate own goal and a fine volley from Lara Dickenmann.

The Blues had it all to do in the second leg and were unable to score the three goals needed to advance to the final. As Chelsea tired, the German outfit grew stronger and put the tie to bed on 70 minutes as Pernille Harder scored to give them a 1-0 lead in Lower Saxony. The Dane cut inside Millie Bright to slot home from the left with her seventh goal in seven games in Europe this season. Less than ten minutes later the hosts doubled their lead through Polish forward Ewa Pajor, as she nodded home a cross from Alexandra Popp to compound Chelsea's misery and send Wolfsburg through to the final with a 5-1 score on aggregate.





Much like City, Chelsea struggled to create chances and were simply outclassed by more experienced opponents over the two legs. Two-time winners Wolfsburg return to the final for the first time since Lyon beat them on penalties in 2016. With both sides worthy winners in their semi-final ties, the final on May 24 should be a real showpiece for the women's game.

**THE FINAL: WOLFSBURG V LYON**  
The 2017/18 UEFA Women's Champions League final will be played in Ukraine for the first time, at Valeriy Lobanovskiy Dynamo Stadium on Thursday May 24 at 6pm, two days before the men's decider at NSK Olimpiyskiy in the Ukrainian capital.









# Notts County Ladies: One year on





# By Helen Rowe-Willcocks and Jess Cully

**O**n April 21 2017, just two days before the opening of the WSL Spring Series, news broke that Notts County Ladies had folded.

The team had been due to play their opening game against Arsenal on the Sunday but players found out the news just 15 minutes before the official announcement.

Previously known as Lincoln Ladies before relocating in 2014, the squad included Lionesses stars Carly Telford, Jo Potter and Laura Bassett. The news came as a shock to everyone but none so much as the loyal fans who had supported the club through the years. Jess Cully, a Notts County fan since 2015 looks back at how the last year, without the club, has changed and affected his life.

## **1) How did you become a Notts County Ladies fan?**

I spent 2006-12 involved with a team in the lower leagues, and then watched only England games and cup finals after that, until I travelled to Canada to support England at the 2015 World Cup. That trip inspired me to start taking an interest in WSL.

I went to a Notts match soon after the league resumed following the World Cup break, as it offered a chance to go to a game with some friends who lived in the East Midlands, and for me to get some of the Lionesses' autographs. That night, I loved the Notts team and the whole matchday experience, and one of my favourite players, Laura Bassett, complimented my World Cup hat and was very impressed that I'd been in Canada. The captain, Sophie Bradley, was another favourite of mine, so that settled it. I was a Lady Pies fan.

## **2) Were you a fan when they were Lincoln Ladies?**

I was never a Lincoln Ladies supporter but I admired them, going back to when my friends Sue Smith and Melissa Cook played for them. At the 2013 Conti Final, their last game as Lincoln, I wanted them to win.

## **3) What is your favourite memory from attending the games?**

I have two. One would be that meeting with Laura at my very first game, the other is from Easter 2016. Two days after Easter, Sophie Bradley-Auckland did a Twitter interview with She Kicks and revealed that she hadn't had an Easter egg as nobody had got her one! So when we played away at Arsenal the following Sunday I arrived early, with an Easter egg. As luck would have it the





Lady Pies team bus was parked outside and Sophie was sitting on the steps. So I presented her with the egg. She seemed a bit bemused but I think she appreciated it.

#### **4) What was your reaction and how did you find out about the folding?**

We're not allowed mobiles in my workplace and, somehow, the story didn't make the news on whatever radio station I had on at work that day. So I found out when I came home from work, switched on my phone and saw a text from one of my women's football friends (who supports a different team) 'Just heard about Notts County Ladies, hope you're OK'. I went to the club Twitter page and couldn't believe it. My team, often the one thing that kept me going, was gone. I was

devastated.

I live a long way from Nottingham so I was thinking I'd never see the girls, or the friends I'd made among the fans, again. I went to my local that evening, where fortunately there were a couple of sympathetic neighbours to talk to, and there I wrote a song about Notts Ladies and their demise, to the tune of American Pie. When I came home from the pub I got out all my Lady Pies memorabilia, laid it out on a table and took a photo of it for Facebook and Twitter, then put it all away in my football memorabilia box. Next day, Saturday, out shopping, I walked around the town with tears in my eyes.

#### **5) Do you think things have been learnt from the folding of Notts County Ladies?**





I believe it's served as a cautionary tale to teams not to financially overstretch themselves. That a few teams haven't applied for the new top two leagues, or have settled for the Championship instead of going for the new WSL, could be evidence that women's clubs are cutting their cloth realistically. The FA bringing in new licence criteria is another possible sign of a lesson having been learned.

#### **6) Have you started supporting another team since?**

I don't support a team but I attend Birmingham City Ladies home games. It's an enjoyable WSL 1 matchday experience within easy travelling reach of me, several of my friends – including some from Notts – often go there, and Lady Pies legends Rachel Williams and Ellen White being there helps.

#### **7) Do you still have the love for the women's game?**

I've lived and breathed women's football since 1998 and several of my

very best friends are people I know through women's football so I was never going to lose my love of the game.

#### **8) How did the folding of your club affect you?**

Very deeply. The farewell wake for players and fans was held midweek at very short notice, because some of the girls were having to move away from Nottingham in a hurry; too short notice for me to get the days off work, so I wasn't able to go. So I'll always feel I never got closure.

Notts Ladies matches – from meeting friends in the pub before the game to chatting to the players after – were so often my one thing to look forward to through drab days at the office and lonely nights at home. I have Asperger's so having that hole ripped in my life has been so hard to deal with. So, especially, was the bullying on Twitter that some of my friends and I received from Notts County men's fans, over what, to us, was a bereavement. That was unforgivable.

Over the following seven months, my mental state went downhill and I stopped looking after myself. My weight ballooned; I have hypertension anyway, and my blood pressure skyrocketed. I managed to turn my physical health around with a prolonged detox but I am now seeing a counsellor in an effort to recover from the emotional wound.

#### **9) Do you think the future of women's football is looking bright?**

English women's football is at a crossroads. Much will depend on whether the new leagues coming in for this September are successful. Obviously, as first and foremost a lover





of women's football who wants the best for our game, I hope they are, and that the Lionesses go from strength to strength.

**10) Is there anything else you would like to add?**

I think our band of hardcore fans missed an opportunity. There was last season another, separate, Notts County Ladies team, in the East Midlands League. One of our keenest fans showed an interest in transferring our allegiance to them, but no-one else took up the idea. I think that if we had all gone there, we could have created a real FC United style vibe. (Over the summer NCFC withdrew the use of their name and badge from this team, and they are now Eastwood Community Ladies, but that would surely just have rallied us disaffected fans behind them more.) But our fans have preferred, in one way or another, to attend WSL games in which some of the former Notts players are playing, and that's understandable. It was that wonderful group of girls that we all loved, and miss, so much. Happily, only a couple of our committed fans appear to have given up women's football altogether.



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