



WSL 23/24 SEASON PREVIEW



CHAMPIONS
2022-23

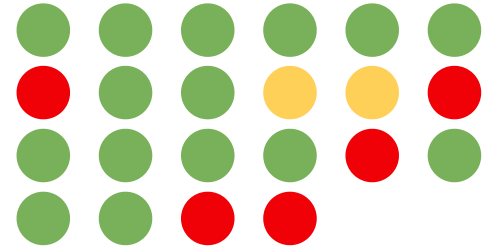


FLYINGGEESE.FOOTBALL

ARSENAL

Arsenal hobbled through the end of last season with the squad decimated by injury but managed to secure themselves an all-important Champions League spot. They finished third on goal difference, ahead of Manchester City, but an unfortunate loss on penalties to Paris FC means the Gunners will have the WSL as their key focus this year. The departure of Rafaelle will be a big defensive blow for Arsenal with Leah Williamson unlikely to be available for a while, whilst Kyra Cooney-Cross was a late transfer window coup following her impressive World Cup performance. Jonas Eidevall is entering his third season as manager and despite winning his first piece of silverware last season, fans will expect a serious title challenge.

LAST SEASON



STYLE OF PLAY

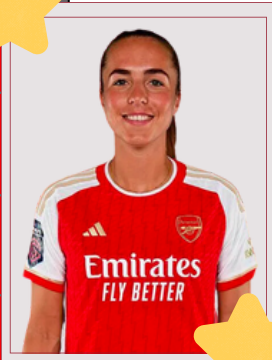
Arsenal have traditionally played in a 4-2-3-1 under Eidevall but experimented with a back three at different points last season. They look to play with a high intensity and Eidevall has prioritised the recruitment of physical players. Arsenal use wide forwards rather than traditional wingers with their ability to cut into the box and score key to the way they want to play.



PLAYER TO WATCH

The Alessia Russo transfer saga was one of the key focuses of the summer but it always seemed inevitably she would end up at Arsenal following their world record bid in January. Russo's ability when it comes to link up play along with her finishing quality is a big positive for Arsenal, but she will need to add more goals if she is going to be considered in the same league as Sam Kerr and Bunny Shaw.

STAR PLAYER



There is no one quite like Lia Wälti. The 30 year old Swiss star, who normally sits at the base of midfield, is key to Arsenal's plan in-possession, particularly in the absence of Leah Williamson. Capable of passing comfortably with both her left and right foot, the shimmy of her hips to get out of tight spots has become a signature move. Her importance to the side is only further underlined if she is unavailable to the team. Keeping her fit will be crucial for Arsenal this season.

INS

Laia Codina, Alessia Russo, Cloé Lacasse, Amanda Ilestedt, Kyra Cooney-Cross

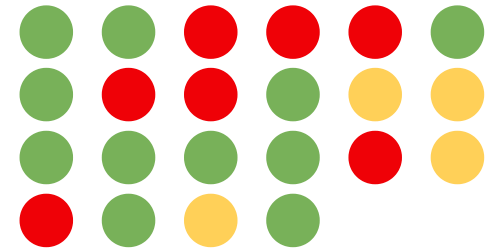
OUTS

Mana Iwabuchi, Anna Patten, Fran Stenson, Rafaelle Souza

ASTON VILLA

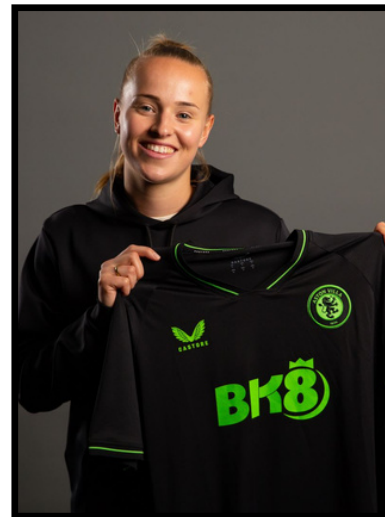
Aston Villa were last season's surprise package as manager Carla Ward took them from a ninth placed finish to a fifth placed one. The challenge for Villa will be whether they can look to maintain that spot or even push on and give the traditional top four a run for their money. They relied heavily on Rachel Daly's goals as the English striker won the Golden Boot, but will need a more diverse set of threats if they want to continue their upward trajectory. Last season's loanees Kirsty Hanson and Anna Patten have both joined permanently which is a big boost, whilst Lucy Parker's recruitment from West Ham will strengthen their defence.

LAST SEASON



STYLE OF PLAY

Villa under Ward play a 4-3-3 with veteran midfielders Jordan Nobbs, Kenza Dali and Lucy Stainforth usually pulling the strings centrally. Hanson offers a driving force down the left hand side as she proved last season that she can be one of the best ball carriers in the league. The aim once higher up the pitch tends to be pretty simple: find Rachel Daly.



PLAYER TO WATCH

The arrival of Dutch goalkeeper Daphne van Domselaar should mean that Hannah Hampton's departure for Chelsea is quickly forgotten. Van Domselaar caught the eye for her performances at Euro 2022 and continued her good form at this summer's World Cup. An incredibly agile shot-stopper, the 23 year old looks set to become one of the best goalkeepers in the world.

STAR PLAYER



Rachel Daly's return to English football could not have gone better. Her 22 goals in the league last season won her the Golden Boot and equalled Vivianne Miedema's single season record. She is the stand out performer in this Aston Villa team, and despite once again reprising her more defensive role for England at the World Cup, will be hoping she can be similarly impactful this season.

INS

Daphne van Domselaar, Lucy Parker, Anna Patten, Kirsty Hanson, Ebony Salmon, Adriana Leon

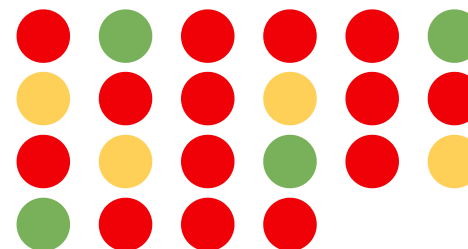
OUTS

Evie Rabjohn, Emily Gielnik, Chantelle Boye-Hlorkah, Meaghan Sargeant, Natasha Harding, Hannah Hampton, Sian Rogers, Remi Allen, Ruesha Littlejohn

BRIGHTON AND HOVE ALBION

Brighton swapped stability for chaos last season as Hope Powell's five year reign as manager came to an end. Melissa Phillips has ended up in charge after a brief sojourn with former Bayern boss Jens Scheuer, and she immediately found herself battling relegation. In the end, the Seagulls managed to stay up and have looked to entirely overhaul their squad this summer. Players like former Barcelona captain Vicky Losada and Portuguese midfielder Tatiana Pinto will bring experience whilst a young trio of signings from Sydney FC ensure there is plenty of youthful exuberance in the side too. Definitely a hipster's pick to do well this season based on their recruitment but they might need time to gel.

LAST SEASON



STYLE OF PLAY

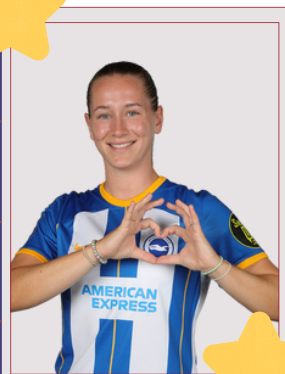
Brighton's end of the season was not necessarily the best indicator of how they might play this year, with Phillips having to focus first and foremost on keeping them up. They were the most passive team in the league when it came to pressing stats, allowing teams to come onto them. With a new set of more talented players coming in, expect Phillips to change that approach.



PLAYER TO WATCH

Pauline Bremer will be a familiar face having scored the goal that knocked Arsenal out of the Champions League last season, as well as holding the best goals per 90 record in WSL history from her time at Manchester City. The 27 year old's career has been riddled with injury but there is no doubt that she is a fantastic goalscorer. If she can stay fit, she could be a gamechanger for Brighton.

STAR PLAYER



It can be hard to shine as an attacking player in a team towards the bottom of the WSL but Elisabeth Terland had no such issues. The attacking player demonstrated her ability to get into dangerous areas and finished as Brighton's top scorer in the WSL with seven goals. Her use of late runs and counter-attacking precision is something opposition teams will want to watch out for.

INS

Pauline Bremer, Vicky Losada, Madison Haley, Mackenzie Hawkesby, Charlie Rule, Maria Thorisdottir, Tatiana Pinto, Li Mengwen, Nicky Evrard, Sophie Baggaley, Jocelyn Carabali

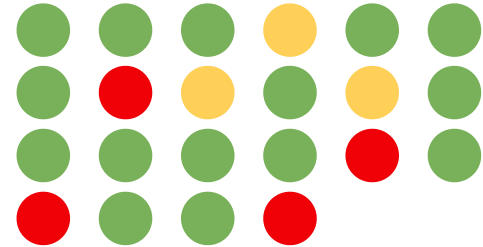
OUTS

Victoria Williams, Kayleigh Green, Rebekah Stott, Megan Walsh, Danielle Carter, Megan Connolly, Briana Visalli

BRISTOL CITY

Bristol City navigated a competitive Championship title race to become that rare sight of a team in the WSL without a men's Premier League team attached. When they were relegated in 2021/22, many feared that it might be the last that was seen of a historic team within the women's game. Bristol City can even count knocking Barcelona out of the Champions League in 2014 as one of their many achievements. The task this year will be more prosaic though - attempt to stay in the top division. Players like Rachel Furness and Megan Connolly will bring experience to the side whilst Jamie-Lee Napier and Ffion Morgan will offer speed on the wings.

LAST SEASON



STYLE OF PLAY

Bristol City predominantly played with a back three last season and it is hard to see them moving away from that in an even trickier league. They managed to concede the fewest goals of any team in the Championship and will be hoping that the defence can hold firm in the WSL. The risk will be that without a proven WSL goalscorer, they end up sitting far too deep.



PLAYER TO WATCH

Bristol City were frustrated that they did not receive any compensation when Chelsea signed Brooke Aspin for free this summer, but they have got her back on loan for the year. Aspin made her debut for the club as a 16 year old and as a no-nonsense defender has drawn comparisons with Millie Bright. A captain for the England U19s, she will no doubt have her work cut out this season.

STAR PLAYER



25 year old Scottish international Abi Harrison is Bristol City's all-time top scorer and was ever-present for them throughout their time in the Championship. Not as free-scoring last year as she was the year before where she scored 17 goals to win the Championship Golden Boot, her first experiences in the WSL with Bristol were tough. She managed just three goals in 22 starts across three seasons, but will be hoping her return as a more mature player is more successful.

INS

Sille Struck, Carrie Jones, Jamie-Lee Napier, Satara Murray, Megan Connolly, Amalie Thestrup, Amy Rodgers, Jess Simpson, Kaylan Marckese

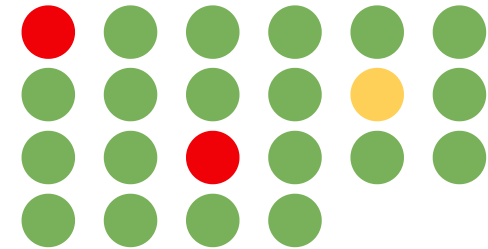
OUTS

Vicky Bruce, Aimee Palmer, Jodie Hutton, Elysia Boddy, Lily Greensdale, Lia Cataldo, Chloe Bull

CHELSEA

Chelsea won their fourth consecutive WSL title last year with a record points total, and continue to look like the team to beat. Despite losing club captain Magdalena Eriksson over the summer, their squad looks even stronger than before with Ashley Lawrence and Sjoeke Nüsken's arrivals fulfilling long-term needs at fullback and defensive midfield. It feels like the only thing that could really distract them from making it five in a row is the lure of the Champions League. It remains the only trophy Hayes has not won as Chelsea manager and there is no doubt that she will make it her team's priority.

LAST SEASON



STYLE OF PLAY

When it comes to Emma Hayes, expect the unexpected. Hayes is well-known for her eccentric tactical decisions, whether in terms of formation or personnel. In the past, they have been high pressing but toned that down in the past year. When it comes to Hayes' management, the key word is pragmatism. She will set her team up however she believes she needs to in order for them to win.



PLAYER TO WATCH

We might have to wait a while to see her but Chelsea bringing in Catarina Macario was one of the transfer coups of the summer. Macario is still recovering from an ACL injury that she suffered at the end of the 2021/22 season but in her time at Lyon she demonstrated why is she one of the world's most highly rated forwards. Capable of playing in midfield or as a striker, she is the perfect replacement for Pernille Harder.

STAR PLAYER



Chelsea's talismanic striker Sam Kerr might have relinquished her grip on the Golden Boot last year but she still finished with 29 goals in all competitions. With 90 goals in 116 appearances, there is a good chance she becomes Chelsea's all-time leading goalscorer this season. Despite having a disappointing home World Cup where she was sidelined with injury until the latter stages, her semi-final goal against England showed exactly why she is a star.

INS

Mia Fishel, Hannah Hampton, Ashley Lawrence, Catarina Macario, Sjoeke Nüsken

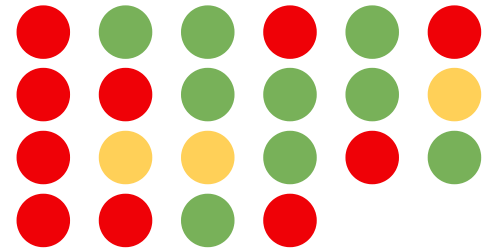
OUTS

Pernille Harder, Magdalena Eriksson

EVERTON

Everton's first season under Brian Sørensen showed signs of promise but ended up being just a quietly solid mid-table finish. They will hope to push on this year but they have had some big losses within their squad. Their first ever professional player Gabby George made a deadline day move to Manchester United after they triggered her release clause whilst last year's loanees Jess Park and Aggie Beever-Jones both returned to their parent clubs. Justine Vanhaevermet is an experienced addition to the midfield whilst Martina Piemonte will make Everton the 9th club she has played for at 25 years old.

LAST SEASON



STYLE OF PLAY

Sørensen seemed very much in his experimental era last season, switching between a back three and four, as well as changing things up by using Nathalie Bjorn in the midfield. At points, it felt like Everton prioritised possession over actual progression and they did have a tendency to overplay. However, if their neat patterns of play are truly taking root this year, they should be a good watch.

STAR PLAYER



Nicoline Sørensen's return from a 14 month injury lay-off having torn her ACL was one of the high points of Everton's season. The winger is one of the most underrated dribblers in the league, regularly causing opposition fullbacks headaches. Her ability to help out defensively and then progress the ball is a real asset to the team. If she can build a good relationship with new signing Piemonte, Everton might finally have some real goal threat.



PLAYER TO WATCH

One loanee who Everton were able to keep hold of was Emily Ramsey who returned on a permanent deal after her contract with Manchester United expired. Young talented English goalkeepers is a crowded field but Ramsey looked to have taken a real step forward in her development last season. Everton have got a bad habit of collapsing to some big losses - some security in goal might help them head that off.

INS

Alyssa Aherne, Heather Payne, Karoline Olesen, Justine Vanhaevermet, Emily Ramsey, Emma Bissell, Martina Piemonte

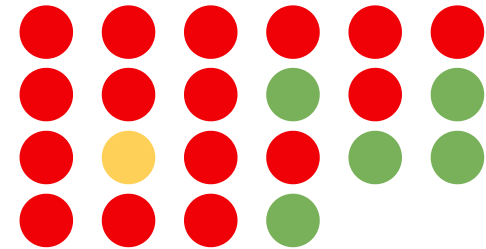
OUTS

Gabby George, Izzy Christiansen, Rikke Sevecke, Leonie Maier

LEICESTER CITY

When Willie Kirk was appointed Director of Football at Leicester, it seemed inevitable he would end up in the managerial seat at some point and he was eventually tasked with keeping them from being relegated. After losing their first nine games of the season, it really looked like there was no way they would manage to stay up but Kirk was able to steady the ship enough that Reading were the team who sunk. There have been concerns about the impact of the relegation of the men's side but it does not seem to have caused too many problems with a whole host of new players brought in. There have been plenty of departures too but Kirk certainly has the managerial capabilities to build up from here.

LAST SEASON



STYLE OF PLAY

Willie Kirk's teams have always been good to watch and Leicester certainly were not playing as directly as some of their relegation rivals were last year. Kirk was happy to play with a back four, although the security of having Manchester City loanee Ruby Mace in front of them certainly helped, and they often did well to win the ball high up the pitch. With the quality of players improving, there is a structure in place for the football to follow.



PLAYER TO WATCH

When you are team in and around the bottom of the WSL, having a star player who can create something out of nothing can be a big boost. Deanne Rose played that role perfectly for Reading in 21/22 and despite missing the majority of 22/23 with an achilles injury, she should be back fit and firing for Leicester. Already capped 75 times by Canada at the age of 24, Rose is a pacy forward who plays with plenty of confidence.

STAR PLAYER



Bringing in Janina Leitzig on loan in January was a game changer for Leicester. The German goalkeeper who had previously played for Hoffenheim and Bayern Munich was crucial in keeping them up, with her shot-stopping a much needed confidence boost for the team. Now back on a permanent deal, all eyes will be on whether Leitzig can continue her good form into the new season.

INS

Deanne Rose, Janina Leitzig, Courtney Nevin, Julie Thibaud, Jutta Rantala, Lize Kop, Aimee Palmer, Janice Cayman, Lena Petermann

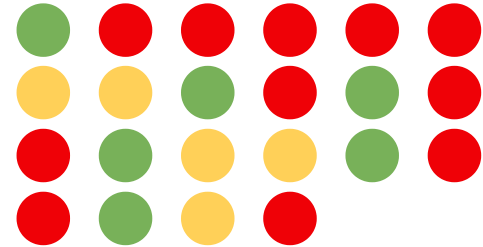
OUTS

Ashleigh Plumptre, Jemma Purfield, Erin Simon, Jess Sigsworth, Natasha Flint, Charlie Devlin, Georgia Eaton-Collins, Ellen Jones, Connie Scofield, Abbie McManus, Molly Pike, Lachante Paul, Sophie Barker, Kirstie Levell, Sophia Poor

LIVERPOOL

Matt Beard's calm return of Liverpool to the WSL was one of the most underrated managerial successes of last season. Their seventh placed finish was comfortable, and despite going on a five game losing run at one point, wins against Chelsea and Manchester City were highlights of the year. They have quietly gone about their transfer business this summer to assemble a much improved squad too. Despite missing out to Manchester United on the signing of Hinata Miyazawa, Sophie Roman Haug will impose the physical threat they have lost with Katie Stengel's departure to Gotham. Grace Fisk and Jenna Clark will both be solid defensive additions whilst in Mia Enderby, they have one of England's most exciting young talents on their books.

LAST SEASON



STYLE OF PLAY

Beard has predominantly played with a back three, using one of his centre-backs to step into midfield as an extra option when building up from the back. Wing backs like Emma Koivisto are expected to try and quickly get high up the pitch whilst it seems like Natasha Flint and Sophie Roman Haug will partner up top as a physical front two.



PLAYER TO WATCH

The Norwegian striker Sophie Roman Haug struggled to nail down a starting role at Roma - ironic given her name - but has scored goals wherever she plays, including bagging a hattrick for Norway at the World Cup. She is a physical presence who is a fantastic header of the ball, but is as adept at creating opportunities as she is at scoring them.

STAR PLAYER



Fuka Nagano might not have been the best Japanese midfielder in the WSL last season but she was pretty close to it. Her January signing seemed to go under the radar but she immediately slotted into Liverpool's starting line up as if she had been there for years. A metronomic presence, Nagano's creativity and on-ball ability is key to the way Liverpool play.

INS

Sophie Roman Haug, Grace Fisk, Mia Enderby, Natasha Flint, Marie Höbinger, Teagan Micah, Jenna Clark

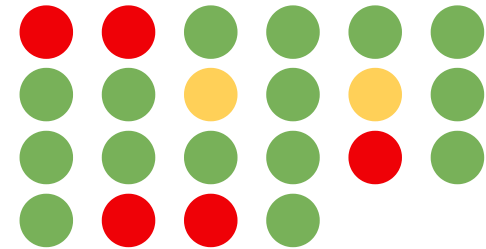
OUTS

Eartha Cummings, Katie Stengel, Carla Humphrey, Ashley Hodson, Leighanne Robe, Charlotte Clark, Megan Campbell, Rylee Foster

MANCHESTER CITY

It was a disappointing start and finish to the season for Manchester City who ended up in fourth position, their lowest since their first year in the WSL. Gareth Taylor had to deal with a lot of upheaval but there was still some surprise that he was handed a year long contract extension. City have had by far the quietest window of any WSL team, a reflection of how settled the current squad is with only Hayley Raso departing. Jill Roord's big money move from Wolfsburg along with Jess Park's return from her loan at Everton will strengthen a side that had the best attacking metrics in the league last season, except when it came to actually putting the ball in the back of the net. Whether they will be defensively strong enough or tactically adept enough to challenge for the title this time out remains to be seen.

LAST SEASON



STYLE OF PLAY

Gareth Taylor is very wedded to the 4-3-3 that Manchester City have played forever, using wingers Lauren Hemp and Chloe Kelly to cross into the box in attempts to pick out Bunny Shaw. He also experimented with inverted fullbacks last season to offer Yui Hasegawa midfield support with the two 8s pushing up to take shots from around the edge of the box.



PLAYER TO WATCH

City might not have brought in a lot of players but they have certainly splashed the cash with Jill Roord returning to the WSL, two years after she left Arsenal. Roord is a player who tends to defy definition with her exact role in teams often curiously hard to pin down. Neither a prolific goalscorer or creator, how exactly she fits into Taylor's quite rigid midfield three will be something to keep an eye on.

STAR PLAYER



Bunny Shaw was close to unstoppable at points last season with her 20 goals and 7 assists both the most goals and goal contributions a Manchester City player had made in a single season. Able to score with her left foot, right foot and head, Shaw's all-round ability makes it hard for defenders to keep up, whilst her physicality from the front often forces them into errors. It seems unlikely she is going to stop scoring for City anytime soon.

INS

Jill Roord

OUTS

Hayley Raso

MANCHESTER UNITED

Despite having their most successful season ever, Manchester United have struggled to keep hold of players this summer with Ona Battle and Alessia Russo moving to Barcelona and Arsenal at the end of their contracts. United were crucially able to keep hold of Mary Earps but Skinner will still have a battle on his hands to settle in new players fast. They have a tough start to their season with Champions League qualifiers also taking place in October. There have been plenty of incomings to make up for the outgoings - and certainly there is no shortage of talent in the squad. But Skinner will not be able to rely on such a small core of players this season if they do reach the Champions League group stages.

STYLE OF PLAY

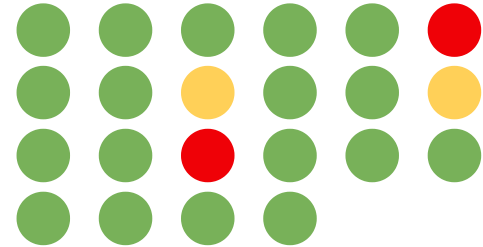
Manchester United set up in a 4-2-3-1 and played a very high pressing style of football last year. They often value quick short passing in order to move up the pitch at speed and are comfortable progressing the ball through central areas. Skinner relied a lot on ten main players to implement his patterns of play last season who were available throughout the season. It will be interesting to see how well the new signings adapt to his methods.

STAR PLAYER



The focus on Ella Toone will likely intensify this season as the team look to her to create with Battle no longer available. Capable of moments of utter brilliance, Toone does have a tendency to not always be able to impose herself on games but there is no questioning the amount of work she puts in on the pitch. Forming strong relationships with United's new attackers will be essential, and if they can find a way to get Toone into the box more often, they could unlock her talents even more.

LAST SEASON



PLAYER TO WATCH

Geyse clearly did not quite fit in at Barcelona leaving after just one year, and it feels like she's struggled with confidence as a result but there is no doubt she is a talented player. She will suit United's high pressing style, and offers a different skill set to Alessia Russo in terms of being a striker who wants to dribble with the ball. She has shown in the past that she can score buckets of goals, something that United sorely need.



INS

Melvine Malard, Phallon Tullis-Joyce, Gabby George, Irene Guerrero, Hinata Miyazawa, Emma Watson, Geyse, Gemma Evans, Evie Rabjohn

OUTS

Alessia Russo, Ona Battle, Sophie Baggaley, Martha Thomas, Ivana Fuso, Vilde Boe Risa, Carrie Jones, Maria Thorisdottir, Kirsty Hanson, Adriana Leon, Aissatou Tounkara, Tara Bourne, Emily Ramsey, Niamh Murphy, Estelle Cascarino, Jade Moore

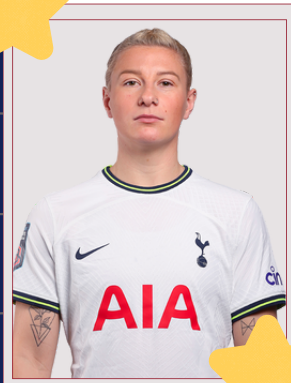
TOTTENHAM

Tottenham had a disastrous season last year, bailed out only by their £250,000 January signing of Bethany England who scored enough goals to see them stay up. Their coach at the time Rehanne Skinner was able to go on a nine game losing run before they saw it fit for her to move on. Now with former BK Häcken manager Robert Vilahamn at the helm, they will be hoping to harness some of the feel-good factor that Ange Postecoglou has brought to the club. England will be missing for the start of the season so there will be pressure on Martha Thomas to step up. Spurs' have failed to score in any of their pre-season games against WSL opposition so there are question marks over where the goals will come from.

STYLE OF PLAY

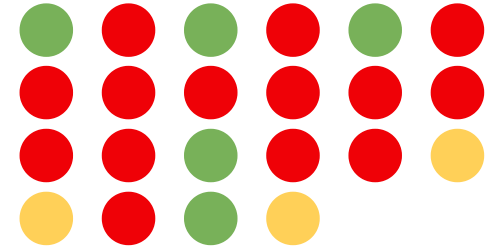
Vilahamn says that part of the reason he was appointed was because both him and Postecoglou want to play in a similar style which the ownership envision for the club. If that is the case then we should be in for a treat with Postecoglou's football free flowing and exciting. Tottenham are in a much trickier state than Vilahamn's previous club however and it might take time for his ideas to take root.

STAR PLAYER



Named captain over the summer, it's fair to say that Bethany England has already made quite a name for herself at Tottenham. Her 12 goals in 12 appearances effectively kept Spurs in the top division. The biggest question for England at Tottenham was whether she would find the back of the net without all of Chelsea's world class creators around her, and she answered it with aplomb. Unavailable at the start of the season with a hip injury, Tottenham will be desperate to get her back.

LAST SEASON



PLAYER TO WATCH

Grace Clinton has joined Tottenham on loan from Manchester United but certainly looks ready to make an impact in a WSL side. Clinton has long been touted to as one of England's best up and coming young prospects and can play as a 10 or as a false 9. Her intelligence on the ball is clear to see and she scored six times in 12 Championship appearances for Bristol City in the second-half of last season.



INS

Martha Thomas, Barbora Votikova, Zhang Linyan, Olga Ahtinen, Grace Clinton, Luana Bühler

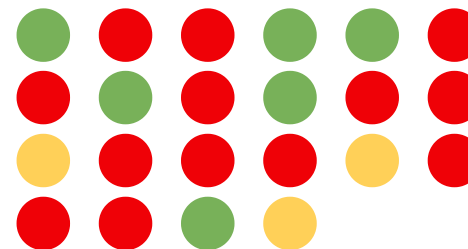
OUTS

Cho So-Hyun, Kerys Harrop, Tinja-Riikka Korpela, Esther Morgan, Kyah Simon, Chioma Ubogagu

WEST HAM

It is not looking good at West Ham who owed their relatively uneventful season last year to a good run of form at the start of the season but looked very shaky by the end of it. Paul Konchesky moved on from his role and in his place has come Rehanne Skinner. Now some might question the wisdom of recruiting a manager who led her team last year on a nine game losing run and into a relegation battle but it is hard to tell how much wisdom there is around West Ham right now. They lost two key centre-backs in Lucy Parker and Grace Fisk but have not really replaced them. They will also be without captain Dagny Brynjarsdottir who is pregnant. It looks like it could be a very long season.

LAST SEASON



STYLE OF PLAY

It has been hard to exactly get an idea of what Rehanne Skinner's style of play was when she was at Tottenham, although she often allowed her most talented players to have free roles in the system. West Ham are well stocked on attacking players but Skinner in the past has tried to prioritise defensive solidity. Organisation has been a problem for West Ham and simplicity will be key.



PLAYER TO WATCH

Riko Ueki has become the third Japanese international to join West Ham's squad, following a well-trodden path at this point. Ueki has left the Tokyo based club where she has spent her entire career, scoring 81 times in 152 games. With World Cup goals also to her name, the 24 year old is an exciting prospect in a team which should have enough attacking talent to score goals.

STAR PLAYER



Mackenzie Arnold became an Australian sporting hero for her role in their penalty shoot-out win over France in the World Cup quarter-finals but she will be back in the more prosaic surroundings of the Chigwell Construction Stadium this season. Named captain in Brynjarsdottir's absence, Arnold is a clear leader from the back and someone who has gone from strength to strength ever since she arrived at West Ham. She might find herself quite busy this season.

INS

Riko Ueki, Emma Harries, Jessie Stapleton, Megan Walsh

OUTS

Grace Fisk, Lucy Parker, Kate Longhurst, Sophie Hillyerd, Brooke Cairns