

FA FOREWORD – Phil Neville, England Senior Women’s Head Coach

When I joined The FA in the spring of 2018, I inherited a squad of players and a support staff who had already achieved a great deal of success under the stewardship of Hope Powell and Mark Sampson. Bronze medalists in the Women’s World Cup 2015 and Semi-Finalists once more in the UEFA Women’s EURO 2017, the summer before my arrival.

What was needed was to build on that success and push on to the next level if we were to achieve our ambition of competing to win a major tournament.

Over the last three years, a phenomenal amount of work has been done to that end. We’ve focused our efforts on improving the talent pathway and encouraging the progression of the best young players through to the senior team.

Enormous credit must go to Mo Marley and the coaches of the women’s development teams who have worked so collaboratively with me on identifying, nurturing and providing opportunities for talented youngsters to progress. We now have a senior squad which is a blend of tremendously experienced players and a large cohort of young and ambitious talent who have their sights firmly set on winning a major tournament.

We were delighted to win the prestigious SheBelieves Cup in 2019, finishing above the best team in the world on their home soil. A few months later we travelled to France for the FIFA Women’s World Cup, reaching the Semi-Finals once again and only narrowly losing to the USA. We played some exceptional football, notably in our Quarter-Final against Norway, and I realised this was a squad capable of winning at the highest level.

We also witnessed an explosion in the profile of the women’s game, captivating a nation and helping change the landscape of participation and support back home. A record sell-out crowd at Wembley Stadium for our friendly against Germany in November says it all. I must acknowledge Baroness Sue Campbell and other FA colleagues for their incredible work and support.

Despite a difficult few months of transition in the Autumn, the future for England Women is very bright indeed. We now have the youngest squad of talented players we’ve had for many years and the home Women’s EURO, now scheduled for 2022, will be the perfect platform for England to achieve a major tournament win. Exciting times are ahead, and we should be proud of what we have all achieved together on the journey so far.

FA NARRATIVE – Kay Cossington, The FA’s Head of Women’s Technical Development

My own coaching career started at West Ham United after many years of playing for the club. You could suggest that I fell into coaching when I helped deliver some training sessions after our manager’s departure. It was at this point that my passion for coaching and performance began. I found a feeling inside me that I had never felt before, a drive to continuously improve performance and preparation.

I transferred across the Thames to become Millwall Lionesses Head Coach and Technical Director and it was here that I learnt some of my biggest lessons and enjoyed working with some exceptional people. There were difficult and challenging circumstances, but I saw first-hand the power of football and how it could change the lives of my players and the community.

Whether it was a win at the weekend, delivering football initiatives in the estates of Lewisham and Southwark, two of the most deprived London boroughs, or supporting football initiatives in Grenada, football could drive positive change.

I have been with The FA for now over 15 years, spending more than a decade coaching various England development teams and then moving into the role of Head of Women's Player Development and Talent in 2017, subsequently becoming Head of Women's Technical Development in 2018 leading our national teams and all technical aspects across the women's game.

I have been involved with *The Gameplan for Growth* strategy from the earliest stages, with my focus specifically on three significant creations; a clear and defined pathway through national development teams to the Seniors, an inclusive women's *Talent ID Strategy* and the *England Women's Blueprint for Success*. All have now been established with the ultimate objective to produce England players who can compete and achieve success on the world stage for our senior team.

Before the implementation phase of these three projects began, I was keen to dig deeper into the history of women's football. I wanted to learn more about the journey that the game has come on and the key pioneers who have taken the game to where it is now and had provided me with the opportunities I have today. This exercise was crucial to provide more depth and meaning to the delivery of the strategy.

As custodians of the women's game in England we felt that we needed a strong sense of identity and a deeper understanding of what we are protecting and nurturing. We needed to identify our story. This was one of those most humbling experiences in my career and has helped shape and inform the work that we now deliver across England Women's national teams, building our identity and team culture.

Respect and gratitude for the pioneers of the game underpins everything we're trying to achieve.

After two years of strategic planning, our efforts began to come to fruition, as we launched the new edition of the Lioness Player Pathway and the *England Women's Blueprint for Success*, both working simultaneously alongside the emerging women's *Talent ID Strategy*. In the summer of 2018, we watched our WU20s squad perform magnificently in France at the FIFA Women's U20 World Cup to secure a bronze medal. We know that we are working from strong foundations, with talented players, and it was now time for us to take this to another level.

The *Lioness Player Pathway* – established with Sport England – is a supplementary programme supporting players in our development teams, with the aim of transforming potential into performance. It supports players through their journey with England from U14 to seniors and ensures appropriate opportunities are in place to help players to fulfil their potential and succeed. The needs of the player are at the very heart of the delivery, and there is an holistic approach to player development ensuring that parents, carers and coaches are integrated into the support.

The emerging women's *Talent ID Strategy* works alongside the Lioness Player Pathway, driving the selection and identification process for all national teams. Our teams are broken into two distinct phases of Youth Development (WU15–WU17), and Professional Development (WU18–WU21), with the Lionesses at the top of the pyramid.

Integral to the inclusiveness of the pathway has been the collaboration and partnership with the EFL Trust. The programme was initiated to provide every talented girl in England the opportunity to access and enter the *Lioness Talent Pathway*. Through the existing community activities of selected Club Community Organisations (CCOs) girls are identified and referred to the pathway.

In August 2019 we launched our first-ever *England Women's Blueprint for Success*, delivered throughout all Women's National Teams. This is an invaluable piece of the jigsaw. Identifying a defined

playing, coaching and operating philosophy at women's national team level is vital if players are to progress seamlessly through the pathway.

Having a bespoke curriculum of learning alongside our England DNA is imperative to produce female players who can compete and win on the world stage. This document also outlines our culture and values when developing our players and has a strong connection with our identity.

This single document defines the processes, structures and support required for each age and stage of the pathway across five pillars of delivery:

- Who We Are – The identity, mentality, purpose and culture of England teams
- How We Play – The philosophy for national teams determining the England style of play and playing principles
- How We Coach & Support – The framework for a multi-disciplinary workforce to plan, implement and review our work with players and teams
- How We Operate – The way in which we work to support England Teams
- Talent Management – The talent management approach for our players and teams

The Blueprint provides clarity in each of these areas and provides a clear framework to enable us to best support our players and keep us united in our mission. The togetherness and team spirit shown through the construction of the blueprint has been exceptional. The staff feel proud and energised by what they are achieving and the legacy in which they will be a part of.

The *Lioness Player Pathway* and *Blueprint for Success* provide a clear mission statement for our workforce about what we want to achieve, and I'm delighted that it has been met with resounding commitment and passion. In the 20 years I have spent in women's football, this is the first time that we have built and created a system that is unique to the women's game and belongs to us.

It is important for our work to be complimented by a strong high-performance system within the domestic game and you will hear more on that next week, when we focus on the development of the women's professional game and the Barclays FA WSL.

We're still just a year into the implementation of this work and we need to be realistic. This is a four-year project and there is still much more work to be done to drive it forward and improve, with our long-term goal of the FIFA Women's World Cup in 2023. With a team so hungry for success, I am confident that we will be reaping the rewards when the tournament arrives.

CASE STUDIES:

Rehanna Skinner – England U18s - U21s Head Coach

"I currently work with the England U21s as Head Coach. Our process is to cycle through a three-year age band with players, meaning I will shortly move to the U18s and then repeat the cycle again. The role includes preparing the players to transition into our Senior team and developing their individual plans, fixture and training programmes. Our overall aim is to give them the best exposure and pathway for them to compete at the highest international level.

The pathway we set out is extremely important as it gives us an opportunity to structure programmes that expose the players to the variety of opposition, tactical formations and technical skills required to compete at the top level of the game. It is also the learnings of travelling abroad, being away from family and friends and about them maturing as players and individuals. It's

important for us to utilise the time we have to prepare them for the transition through the age groups.

As the Head Coach, it's important to establish a solid set up of staff within the group to ensure the players have support whenever it's needed whilst on international duty. The environment is always a player centred approach, which is crucial. Everything is tailored to suit the individual and focused on how we will get the best from them to help them grow and be more effective within the team. Within the multi-disciplinary team, the players work closely with goalkeeping coaches, technical coaches, medical staff, physical performance staff and performance psychologists to help them deal with the mental side of the game. All of this is in preparation for the international stage.

The *FA Women's Talent ID Strategy* aims to select the strongest players for our development squads. As coaches we observe games, attend club training and work closely with clubs to identify potential players. The strategy is separated into phases, and as part of my role, I focus on the *Professional Development* phase ensuring that players are selected based on their potential to work their way up to the elite level from the ages of 17 and 18. Developing club relationships so we can work closely to establish individual development plans for players is key. We collaborate to set priority goals to develop the player to be successful both for club and country. When we attend a player's club, it's important for us to see how much the individual has improved in club time and what they have been working on, so when they back on international duty we know what physical, psychological, tactical and technical areas we should focus with them on.

Within my role, it's amazing to be part of the journey of preparing our country's most talented youth players to achieve the biggest moment in their international career. Seeing the players you have helped develop from the age of 18 gain their senior England cap is a very special feeling."

Jill Scott – England Senior Player

"My England journey started when I was 19 years old, so I've been in the set up for 13 years now. I've been lucky enough to have played under some brilliant managers and enjoyed different strategies and game plans, but one common ground is that the team are always encouraged to strive for success.

To represent your country means absolutely everything. When I was six years old, I started playing football with the boys at school, and at the age of nine I was told football wasn't a sport to be played by girls. I remember crying to my mum as I'd been told I should play netball instead! In those days, I would look up to the likes of Michael Owen and David Beckham and even though they were male, I always strived to continue playing and be an England footballer one day. For that to be a reality now, and for young girls to be looking up to female footballers as role models is incredible. It's a great time to be involved in the women's game.

As senior players we are looked at as role models so it's important to show those coming through the pathway what can be achieved if you work hard. I have the saying, 'aim to inspire before you expire' which I think perfectly sums up our role.

Within the England set up, I think there's a clear DNA which links the youth teams to the senior team and that's important to have. Firstly, the DNA of the England teams is about your attitude, determination and the want to play for your country. Secondly, it's the physical side of the game. I've been fortunate enough to attend youth training camps and quite often, their training regime and drills replicate what we do at a senior level. That's important to establish early on as the transition through the age groups to the senior level will be easier for those involved. They also take part in the same fitness sessions as us so it's good competition to see who's hot on our heels.

It's also important to learn how to be an England player from a young age as there is a lot of pressure and responsibility that comes with it. I joined the England set up quite late in terms of my age so if I'm honest, I struggled when I joined as I'd missed out on the knowledge of the game and how England liked to play. Suddenly, I was in the under 19s, and then straight into the senior team. When I stepped into the changing room on my senior debut, I looked round and my heroes Kelly Smith and Rachel Yankey were there. It was crazy to think I was about to play alongside them. Mentally it was a lot of pressure, whereas now, I think the youth players are involved in the senior set up a lot more meaning the environment doesn't come as a surprise. The work The FA are doing at the younger age groups, the time, the effort, and the coaching is fantastic in improving the standard of the England women's game.

As a senior player, the England coaches work with us on a lot of different playing formats, passages of play and systems on and off the pitch – all still relating back to that England DNA. What's also important is they spend time ensuring they work with us on an individual level. We all have a plan which identifies our strengths and makes sure we keep working on the reasons we were chosen to represent our country in the first place.

Every time I travel with England to represent my country, it's a feeling I cannot explain. The spirit within the team is great and it really does feel like one family. I've been lucky enough to attend four World Cups and three European Championships, but I know we have more to give and want to do even better in the future. One thing is for certain is that every time I put on that England shirt, the pride I feel gets stronger and stronger."

Ebony Salmon – England U19s Player

"I first started playing football when I was six years old and I was part of a boys' team for eight years. At the age of 14, I was signed by Aston Villa and that's where my journey as a female footballer really began. During my career I've had spells at Manchester United, Sheffield United and now as a professional at Bristol City playing in the Barclays FA WSL.

As a young girl, I would always dream of playing for England and representing my country. In 2016 at the age of 15, that dream came true when I was called up for a fixture camp against Germany. Since then I have competed in two European Championships, one at U17s and one at U19s. I'm extremely lucky to have been involved from such a young age.

The support we are provided whilst on international duty focuses on four key areas aiming to improve our development as people and players - technical, tactical, psychological and physical. The England coaches ensure we leave camp with a clear framework of what we should be working on and how we can improve whilst we are with our clubs. I know there is a close relationship between club and international coaches, and I think that's important to ensure we are constantly developing.

Transitioning through the England development age groups means you mature and grow as you are developing. As a young footballer, it's important to have a good support system around you, and the team at The FA and England play a huge part in that.

We now have a clear pathway to determine where we want to go as footballers, and the growth of the women's game in recent years is supporting the importance of this set up. Seeing the Lionesses with our own eyes and knowing there is an opportunity to play at the top level, makes us work harder to get to where we want to be. Nikita Parris is a role model of mine and it's great to have someone to aspire to who has also come through the age groups and is now an important part of the Senior team.

I always feel such pride when walking out to represent England. Seeing my family and friends there supporting me is always an amazing feeling. At the age of 19, I know I've got to keep working hard in establishing myself in the Barclays FA WSL and the England set up and I'm determined to do so. Whether it's a player or fan, I'm looking forward to the 2022 Women's European Championships on home soil."