

Loeh Williamson and Keira Walsh lift the UEFA Women's EURO trophy, after the England team's victory in the UEFA Women's EURO 2025 final against Spain.

SNAPSHOT THE LIONESSES ROAR

The UEFA Women's EURO 2025 proved a festival of football in Switzerland. There was a record attendance of 657,291 spectators, plenty of goals (106 at a rate of 3.42 goals per game) and some tense, nerve-jangling encounters.

World Cup winners Spain defeated Belgium 6-2 and Portugal 5-0 whilst defending champions England won against the Netherlands 4-0 and Wales 6-1. The knockout stages, though, proved far closer. England needed extra time in their semi-final versus a spirited Italian team, and a penalty shootout in the round before, against Sweden, to progress. Spain, too, were thankful for a goal from the player of the tournament, Aitana Bonmatí, to defeat Germany in extra time.

Undoubted favourites in the final, Spain scored first and controlled much of the game before England bounced back with a header from Alessia Russo. England's Hannah Hampton, was the far busier of the two goalkeepers and would win player of the match in a fine display capped by two saves in the penalty shootout. Chloe Kelly struck the winning penalty (she had scored the winner in the EURO 2022 final) to give the Lionesses back-to-back European Championship titles – the first major tournament an England team have won away from home. England's coach, Sarina Wiegman became the first coach of any gender to guide international teams to the final of five major tournaments in a row.



ZINEDINE ZIDANEFRANCE • BORN 1972
CAPS: 108 • GOALS: 31

The son of Algerian immigrants, Zidane grew up in Marseille with posters of his idol, Enzo Francescoli of Uruguay, on his wall. His first club was Cannes, followed by Bordeaux, where he won France's Young Player of the Year award in 1992. On his international debut in 1994, he scored both of France's goals in a 2-2 draw with the Czech Republic. In 1995-96, Zidane played 57 matches – more than any other French player – and he appeared jaded as he underperformed at EURO '96. But a move to Juventus in the same year saw him regain his best form, as he helped the Serie A giants win two league titles. Zidane was a key part of the French side that captured a double of World Cup (1998) and European Championships (2000). As the best midfielder in the world, he won World Player of the Year titles in 1998, 2000 and 2003. Zidane's last tournament, the 2006 World Cup, was memorable as he led France to the final, scoring three goals on the way and being voted FIFA's player of the tournament. He was sent off in the final, however, for a headbutt to the chest of Italy's Marco Materazzi.



◀ Zidane in action during France's 3-1 win over Spain at the 2006 World Cup.

CRISTIANO RONALDOPORTUGAL • BORN 1985
CAPS: 221 • GOALS: 138

A winger who, in his later years, has played more as a centre-forward, Ronaldo began his career on the Portuguese island of Madeira before joining Sporting Clube de Portugal. He joined Manchester United in 2003, where he blossomed into one of the world's greatest attackers, bewildering defenders with tricks and pace, outstanding ball control and masterful free kicks. He helped to propel United to three successive Premier League titles as well as the Champions League crown in 2008. Ronaldo joined Real Madrid in 2009 for a world-record fee of £80 million and made a huge impact, scoring 450 goals in just 438 games as he won four Champions League and two Spanish league titles. He captained Portugal to EURO 2016 and UEFA Nations League 2019 glory, by which time he was freely scoring for Juventus, netting 101 goals in 138 games. After a spell back at Manchester United, he moved to Al-Nassr in the Saudi Pro League in late 2022, scoring 99 goals in his first 111 matches.

▶ Cristiano Ronaldo has captained Portugal since 2008 and is his country's most-capped player and leading scorer.

**WORLD-RECORD TRANSFERS**

PLAYER	FROM	TO	FEE	YEAR
Neymar	Barcelona	Paris Saint-Germain	£198 million	2017
Kylian Mbappé	Monaco	Paris Saint-Germain	£158 million	2018
Florian Wirtz	Bayer Leverkusen	Liverpool	£116 million	2025
João Félix	Benfica	Atlético Madrid	£113 million	2019
Enzo Fernández	Benfica	Chelsea	£106.8 million	2023
Philippe Coutinho	Liverpool	Barcelona	£106 million	2018
Antoine Griezmann	Atlético Madrid	Barcelona	£103 million	2019
Jack Grealish	Aston Villa	Manchester City	£100 million	2021
Declan Rice	West Ham Utd	Arsenal	£100 million	2023
Moisés Caicedo	Brighton & Hove	Chelsea	£100 million	2023
Romelu Lukaku	Inter Milan	Chelsea	£97.5 million	2021

JUDE BELLINGHAMENGLAND • BORN 2003
CAPS: 42 • GOALS: 6

A precocious talent, Bellingham was just 16 years and 38 days old when he made his first-team debut for Birmingham City, having scored over 700 goals in amateur football. His composure, clean tackling and decisive passing immediately marked him out as special. An England call-up came in 2020, the same year that he moved to Borussia Dortmund for around £25 million. In 2022-23, Bellingham's poise, drive and finesse propelled Dortmund to second place in the closest Bundesliga title race since 2001-02, his team finishing level on points with Bayern Munich. He won the Bundesliga Player of the Year award and, still in his teens, was signed by Real Madrid for 103 million euros, scoring 23 goals in the 2023-24 season.



▶ Bellingham scored 13 goals in his first 14 matches for Real Madrid.

MICHAEL LAUDRUP

DENMARK • BORN 1964 • CAPS: 104 • GOALS: 37

The peak of Michael Laudrup's international career came in the quarter-finals of the 1998 World Cup, where Denmark lost narrowly to Brazil 3-2 – despite his younger brother, Brian, scoring a goal. Laudrup was much in demand as an attacking midfielder, playing for Lazio and Juventus in Italy and winning five league titles in Spain with Barcelona and Real Madrid. Sadly, he missed out on Denmark's finest hour – their EURO '92 triumph, when he argued about tactics with the coach and was dropped.



▶ Michael Laudrup drives effortlessly forwards during a 1996 friendly match against Germany.

FACTFILE

Michael Laudrup is the only player to have appeared for Real Madrid in a 5-0 win over Barcelona and also for Barcelona when they have beaten Real 5-0.

CARLI LLOYD

USA • BORN 1982 • CAPS: 316 • GOALS: 134

A livewire attacker with stamina, pace and a lethal shot, Lloyd played for W-League team New Jersey Splash whilst still at High School. She made her international debut at age 23 and became a fixture in the US women's team that won two Olympic gold medals and the 2015 World Cup. In that competition, Lloyd was at her peak, scoring six times, including a hat-trick in the final that featured a goal from the halfway line. Lloyd was made player of the tournament and was also voted the world's best female footballer in both 2015 and 2016. Save for a short spell in 2017-18 with Manchester City, Lloyd's club career was spent entirely in the US with teams including Chicago Red Stars and Western New York Flash. In 2021, she announced her retirement, going out with a bang by scoring five goals in a friendly against Paraguay.

▶ Carli Lloyd celebrates a 4-3 US victory over Australia to win Olympic bronze in 2021.

**AMANDINE HENRY**FRANCE • BORN 1989
CAPS: 109 • GOALS: 14

Henry's first season in senior football saw the bustling midfielder score 11 goals in 20 games for Henin-Beaumont – an outstanding return for a 15-year-old. Severe injuries blighted her early time at Lyon before she got the chance to shine, going on to win an astonishing 13 league titles and seven Women's Championships League crowns before moving to the NWSL in 2023 and Mexico with Toluca in 2024. Henry mostly plays as a central midfielder, stopping attacks and setting up her own team's play with expert passing. She has been a valuable asset for France, with whom she won the Silver Ball as the second-best player at the 2015 Women's World Cup.

▶ Amandine Henry moves upfield against Brazil at the 2019 World Cup. She missed the 2023 tournament with a calf injury.



FOOTBALL DREAMS

From Beijing to Buenos Aires, Manchester to Mexico City, millions of children, teenagers and adults play football for fun, sport and exercise. Many are content to take part at an amateur level, but for some, the dream of emulating the stars they read about, watch and worship is a passion.



▲ USC Trojans take on UCLA Bruins in the NCAA Division I, the pinnacle of the US women's college game.

YOUNG DREAMS

In most countries, young footballers can play at a regional, county or state level in organized youth team competitions. Major football clubs run youth sides and football academies, and also send scouts to watch games in the hope of spotting new talent. Young players may be invited to an open day or trial, where scouts and coaches can observe them in action at close hand. A club may then offer a contract or a place at its youth academy to a promising player. Notable academies exist at Barcelona, Bayern Munich and Porto. One of the most famous is Ajax's De Toekomst youth academy, which has been responsible for a host of great players – from Johan Cruyff and Dennis Bergkamp in the past to Christian Eriksen, Frenkie de Jong and Sven Botman in recent years.

► Martin Ødegaard was just 15 when he played in the top Norwegian league for Strømsgodset and made his debut for Norway (pictured). By the age of 17 he had played for Real Madrid before moving to Arsenal for 35 million euros in 2021.

FACTFILE

In 2015, Vanuatu's U23 team beat Micronesia by a record scoreline of 46-0. It was the second heavy defeat for Micronesia, who earlier that year lost 38-0 to Fiji.

YOUTH TEAMS AND COMPETITIONS

As young players approach the pinnacle of the game, there are international matches for schoolboys and schoolgirls as well as under-17 and youth competitions. These reach a peak with the FIFA U-20 World Cup. At the 1991 tournament, Portugal swept to the title with a midfield containing teenagers João Pinto, Rui Costa and Luis Figo. Argentina won five of the ten competitions held between 1993 and 2011, whilst Erling Haaland scored nine goals in a single game at the 2019 competition, which was won by Ukraine with South Korea second and Ecuador third. FIFA's Under-17 World Cup has also unearthed its own stars from Landon Donovan to Phil Foden, the most valuable player of the 2017 tournament.

Some players are thrown into their club or national team at a very early age. Steven Appiah was 14 when he debuted for Ghana, Ellie Carpenter 15 when she first appeared for the Australian women's team and Pelé 16 when he turned out for Brazil.

▼ Jude Bellingham was only 16 years old when he made his professional debut for Birmingham City, who sold him aged 17 to Borussia Dortmund for £25 million. He was just 19 when he signed for Real Madrid for €103 million.



FACTFILE

In 2014, Gloria Villalobos made her debut for Costa Rica at the age of 14. The following year she appeared at the 2015 Women's World Cup.

HANDLING REJECTION

For millions of wannabes, the hope of playing professional football remains just a dream. As players rise through the footballing ranks, the vast majority find that their talents are surpassed by others and they are unable to progress further. Some talented young footballers are rejected because coaches believe their slight build or lack of height would put them at a disadvantage. As youngsters, Antoine Griezmann was rejected by Lyon, Roy Keane by Brighton and Marcus Rashford by Manchester City, all for being too small.

Rejection is hard to take for many junior players, but it spurs some on to train harder and smarter and overcome barriers to prove their doubters wrong. Argentinian wide player Javier Zanetti was turned down by Independiente's youth academy for not being robust enough to play professional football. He eventually signed for Italian giants Inter Milan, for whom he played a record 858 matches. In 2002, a very young Harry Kane was released from Arsenal's youth academy. He joined Tottenham's academy two years later and went on to become one of the world's most feared centre-forwards.

▼ Blind football matches last for 50 minutes. Here, Tomonari Kuroda of Team Japan holds off Spain during a Paralympic match in 2021.



FOOTBALL FOR ALL

Football can be enjoyed in all climates and conditions and by people of all ages and abilities. It is also played competitively by footballers with disabilities that range from being wheelchair-bound to having impaired hearing. At the 2021 Deaflympics, Ukraine won the men's gold and the USA the women's. Amputee football is played by outfield players using crutches, but no artificial leg, and by goalkeepers who are single-arm amputees. Football for blind and visually impaired athletes uses a special ball. It contains a noise-making device that makes a distinctive sound as the ball moves. Teams consist of four blind outfield players, a keeper (who can be partially sighted) and five substitutes. In 2004, the sport made its debut at the Paralympics. Brazil won the first five Paralympic tournaments before France triumphed in 2024, defeating Argentina in the final.

THE EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIPS

The European Championships began in 1958 as the UEFA European Nations Cup, but struggled to attract teams to compete. However, today it is the largest international football competition behind the World Cup. It is also held every four years.

HOSTS AND WINNERS

Year	Host	Final
1964	Spain	Spain 2-1 USSR
1968	Italy	Italy 2-0 Yugoslavia (after replay)
1972	Belgium	West Germany 3-0 USSR
1976	Yugoslavia	Czechoslovakia 2-2 W. Germany (5-3 pens)
1980	Italy	West Germany 2-1 Belgium
1984	France	France 2-0 Spain
1988	West Germany	Netherlands 2-0 USSR
1992	Sweden	Denmark 2-0 Germany
1996	England	Germany 2-1 Czech Republic
2000	Belgium / Neth.	France 2-1 Italy
2004	Portugal	Greece 1-0 Portugal
2008	Austria / Switz.	Spain 1-0 Germany
2012	Poland / Ukraine	Spain 4-0 Italy
2016	France	Portugal 1-0 France
2020	Europe-wide	Italy 1-1 England (3-2 pens)
2024	Germany	Spain 2-1 England

FACTFILE

Midfielder Michel Platini holds the record for the most goals scored in a European Championships. He scored nine of France's 14 goals in the 1984 competition.

GROWING COMPETITION

Early tournaments consisted of qualifying rounds with just four teams progressing to a mini tournament of semi-finals and a final. By 1980, this was extended to eight sides and it doubled again for the 1996 tournament, the first held in England. Before expansion, many talented sides missed out on the tournament, such as the Soviet Union in 1984 and Spain and Italy in 1992. EURO 2016 saw further growth with 24 teams taking part. Five nations made their EURO debuts at this tournament, with Iceland and Wales making the biggest impact. EURO 2024 saw Georgia make their debut.

SURPRISE WINNERS

EURO 1992 saw Denmark record a memorable triumph. They had failed to qualify and most of their players were on holiday when UEFA invited them to the tournament following Yugoslavia's disqualification. With little time to prepare, the Danes defeated the Netherlands and Germany to win the most unlikely of European Championship crowns. In 1976, Czechoslovakia surprised everyone by beating the World Cup holders, West Germany, in the final. EURO 2004 began with shocks aplenty when Spain and Italy were knocked out early, followed by Germany who had been held to a draw by minnows Latvia. Greece had defeated the tournament hosts Portugal in the opening match, only to face them again in the final. Greek forward Angelos Charisteas scored his third goal of EURO 2004 in the 57th minute, as Greece won 1-0 to secure their first major international trophy.

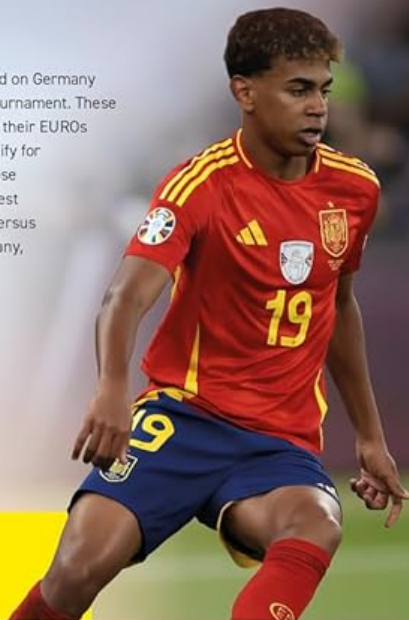
FACTFILE

Spanish leader General Franco, a critic of communism, refused the Soviet team entry into Spain to play their qualifying game for the 1960 competition. The Soviets were awarded a win.

EURO 2024

Twenty-four teams descended on Germany for a cheerful, well-attended tournament. These included Georgia who celebrated their EUROs debut by defeating Portugal to qualify for the knockout stages and Albania whose winger, Nedim Bajrami, scored the fastest ever EUROs goal after just 22 seconds, versus Italy. Spain knocked out Georgia and Germany, then France to reach the final. There, they faced an England side that had nearly been eliminated by Slovakia until Jude Bellingham's spectacular overhead kick goal threw them a lifeline. England had no answer to Spain's controlled possession game in which Nico Williams, Lamine Yamal and Dani Olmo were outstanding. Spain's 2-1 win meant they took the EUROs crown for a record fourth time.

► Lamine Yamal was the EURO's youngest goalscorer, four days before his 17th birthday, and the youngest winner, one day after it.



WOMEN'S EUROS

Starting in 1984 with just four invited teams, the women's EUROs has expanded, with 16 sides taking part for the first time in 2017. That tournament was won by the Netherlands, the fourth time a host nation had triumphed. They joined Norway (1987, 1993) and Sweden (1984) as the only teams to stop Germany, who have dominated the competition with an astonishing eight tournament wins. The 2022 tournament saw the hosts England defeat Germany to win their first ever EURO. At EURO 2025, women's football continued to astound. England showed great resilience and nerve to bounce back from defeat to France, and nail-bitingly close matches against Sweden and Italy, to defend their title, overcoming Spain in a penalty shootout.



◀ German midfielder Felicitas Rauch battles Beth Mead during the EURO 2022 final. The England striker won the Golden Boot with six goals, level with Alexandra Popp but ahead on assists.

◀ Denmark celebrate in 1992 ► Spain's Jordi Alba tussles with Mario Balotelli of Italy in 2012.

►► Ronaldo lifts the trophy as Portugal toast their 2016 victory.

