

Demographic analysis of five major women's football leagues

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1. Introduction

The 36th CIES Football Observatory Monthly Report develops the study presented last June in the 26th edition on the demographic features of clubs in women's football leagues. The report analyses the composition of squads in five of the world's most developed competitions: four European (Germany, Sweden, France and England), as well as the Women's National Soccer League in the United States.

The study investigates the criteria of age, origin and international status of players. The indicators were calculated by taking into account the playing time of each footballer in order to present on-pitch data. The statistics on the main expatriate origins include all the players fielded or having been on the bench at least once for championship matches of the current season up until the 1st of June 2018.

2. Age

The average age of line-ups fielded by clubs in the five leagues surveyed is 25.4 years. While still relatively young, the age increased compared to the previous year (+0.3 years). The rise was particularly marked in the English (+1.1 years) and French (+0.7 years) top divisions. The economic development of the championships studied is leading to a progressive increase in the average age of players.

Clubs from the US Women's National Soccer League fielded the oldest line-ups (26.7 years). At the opposite end of the table is the English Women's Super League (25.0 years). The gaps between the competitions surveyed diminished compared to 2017. This suggests that the professionalisation of women's football implies a convergence between top leagues from an age perspective.

The three teams having on average fielded the youngest line-ups so far this season are from the English Women's Super League (Yeovil Town, Bristol City and Everton). On the contrary, three out of the four teams with the most experienced line-ups are from the US Women's National Soccer League (Seattle Reign, Utah Royals and Orlando Pride). UEFA Champions League finalists Olympique Lyonnais and VfL Wolfsburg also are among the ten most experienced teams from an age line-up standpoint.

Figure 1: average age on the pitch, by league

	2017	2018	Evol
Damallsvenskan (SWE)	25.2	25.3	+0.1
Féminine Division 1 (FRA)	24.7	25.4	+0.7
Frauen Bundesliga (GER)	25.5	25.3	-0.2
NWSL (USA)	26.2	26.7	+0.5
WSL (ENG)	23.9	25.0	+1.1
Total	25.1	25.4	+0.3

Figure 2: average age of line-ups, youngest / oldest

Youngest line-ups		
1	Yeovil Town (ENG)	20.4
2	Bristol City (ENG)	22.8
3	Everton (ENG)	23.1
4	Hoffenheim (GER)	23.3
5	Växjö (SWE)	23.5
6	Werder Bremen (GER)	23.9
7	Freiburg (GER)	24.0
8	Guingamp (FRA)	24.1
.	ASPTT Albi (FRA)	24.1
.	Limhamn Bunkeflo 07 (SWE)	24.1
Oldest line-ups		
1	Seattle Reign (USA)	29.2
2	Utah Royals (USA)	28.9
3	Reading (ENG)	28.6
4	Orlando Pride (USA)	28.0
5	Wolfsburg (GER)	27.8
.	Chelsea (ENG)	27.8
7	Duisburg (GER)	27.1
8	Olympique Lyonnais (FRA)	26.7
9	North Carolina Courage (USA)	26.6
.	Vittsjö (SWE)	26.6
.	Bayern München (GER)	26.6

3. Expatriates

Women's football is generating more and more international migrations. On the 1st June 2017, 300 footballers were expatriated in the 55 clubs analysed (5.4 per team, 24.0% of squads). One year later, this number went up to 348 (6.3 per team, 27.2% of squads). The notion of expatriate refers to footballers playing outside of the association where they started playing football, from where they departed following recruitment by a foreign club.

Expatriate footballers played at least one quarter of domestic league minutes in all leagues surveyed: from 27.5% in the top French division to 35.2% in the US Women's National Soccer League. In this case too, a convergence was observed among the competitions analysed. The economic development of women's football fosters the international mobility of players. This will most probably lead to a further increase in the presence of expatriates both on the pitch and in squads.

The highest percentage of minutes by expatriate players was recorded for Arsenal (65.5%). Expatriates played a majority of minutes in six other teams, including UEFA Champions League finalists Wolfsburg. The winners of this competition, Olympique Lyonnais, also figure in the top 20 table (40.8%). Only a club out of the 55 analysed did not field expatriate players: SGS Essen in Germany. The latter figure was five in 2017.

Not including Welsh players in England, Canada is the main exporter of footballers to the leagues surveyed in this report. On the 1st June 2018, 27 Canadians were playing abroad in the competitions analysed. Players from the USA (22, 10 in Sweden) and the Netherlands (20 players, 9 in England) are also well represented. In total, 50 associations have expatriates in the championships studied (+3 compared to 2017).

Figure 3: % of minutes by expatriates, by league

	2017	2018	Evol
Damallsvenskan (SWE)	31.6%	32.0%	+0.4%
Féminine Division 1 (FRA)	17.6%	27.5%	+9.9%
Frauen Bundesliga (GER)	35.0%	33.3%	-1.7%
NWSL (USA)	30.8%	30.4%	-0.4%
WSL (ENG)	33.3%	35.2%	+1.9%
Total	28.0%	31.6%	+3.6%

Figure 4: highest % of minutes by expatriates, per club

1 Arsenal (ENG)	65.5	
2 Rosengård (SWE)	61.0	
3 Wolfsburg (GER)	60.9	
4 SC Sand (GER)	57.0	
5 PSG (FRA)	53.2	
6 USV Jena (GER)	52.9	
7 Montpellier (FRA)	50.1	
8 Bristol City (ENG)	48.2	
9 Yeovil Town (ENG)	47.8	
10 Duisburg (GER)	46.2	
11 FFC Frankfurt (GER)	45.9	
Bayern München (GER)	45.9	
13 Utah Royals (USA)	45.7	
14 Djurgården (SWE)	45.6	
15 ASPTT Albi (FRA)	44.6	
16 Chelsea (ENG)	44.3	
17 Seattle Reign (USA)	44.2	
18 Houston Dash (USA)	44.0	
19 Vittsjö (SWE)	40.8	
Olympique Lyonnais (FRA)	40.8	

Figure 5: main origins of expatriates

1 Wales	29	Belgium	10
2 Canada	27	Finland	9
3 USA	22	Germany	9
4 The Netherlands	20	Iceland	9
5 Scotland	17	Republic of Ireland	9
6 Austria	15	Switzerland	9
7 Denmark	14	Japan	8
8 Norway	13	England	7
Sweden	13	Nigeria	7
10 New Zealand	12	Poland	6
11 Brazil	11	Serbia	6
12 Australia	10	Spain	6

4. Full internationals

On the 1st June 2018, footballers who have already played in national A-teams made up 36.5% of squads of teams studied. Full internationals played 49.5% of total domestic league minutes (+5% compared to the same moment of the season in 2017). This rise reflects the increase in the expatriate presence and confirms the central position of the leagues surveyed in the global economy of women's football.

The percentage of minutes by full internationals is over one third in all of the competitions surveyed. It goes from 37.3% in the Damallsvenskan to 57.1% in the NWSL. The highest increase compared to 2017 was recorded for the French Division 1: from 34.8% to 48.2% (+13.4%). A slight decrease was observed in two out of the five leagues studied: the Damallsvenskan (-4.5%) and the Frauen Bundesliga (-2.1%).

The most successful women's teams field almost exclusively players with international status. The highest values in absolute were measured for UEFA Champions League finalists: Wolfsburg (95.5%) and Olympique Lyonnais (95.4%). Full internationals played more than half of domestic league minutes in 22 other teams. At the other end of the scale, the lowest percentages were recorded at Hammarby (5.6%), Sunderland (7.8%) and Växjö (8.9%).

Figure 6: % of minutes by full internationals, by league

	2017	2018	Evol
Damallsvenskan (SWE)	41.8%	37.3%	-4.5%
Féminine Division 1 (FRA)	34.8%	48.2%	+13.4%
Frauen Bundesliga (GER)	52.1%	50.0%	-2.1%
NWSL (USA)	52.3%	57.1%	+4.8%
WSL (ENG)	47.7%	52.4%	+4.7%
Total	44.5%	49.5%	+5.0%

Figure 7: highest % of minutes by full internationals, by club

1 Wolfsburg (GER)	95.5	
2 Olympique Lyonnais (FRA)	95.4	
3 Chelsea (ENG)	94.9	
4 Bayern München (GER)	94.1	
5 Rosengård (SWE)	91.8	
6 PSG (FRA)	90.6	
7 Arsenal (ENG)	89.7	
8 Montpellier (FRA)	87.2	
9 Manchester City (ENG)	86.0	
10 North Carolina Courage (USA)	77.9	
11 Turbine Potsdam (GER)	72.2	
12 Paris (FRA)	68.8	
13 Linköping (SWE)	65.8	
14 Houston Dash (USA)	65.6	
15 Utah Royals (USA)	63.6	
16 Seattle Reign (USA)	63.1	
17 Orlando Pride (USA)	60.5	
18 Reading (ENG)	59.0	
19 SC Sand (GER)	57.0	
20 Freiburg (GER)	55.0	
21 Sky Blue (USA)	54.1	
22 Liverpool (ENG)	53.1	
23 Göteborg (SWE)	51.3	
24 Washington Spirit (USA)	50.5	

5. Conclusion

The economic development and professionalisation of the women's game are leading to several processes already observed at men's level. A convergence process notably exists in terms of players' age. While on average still younger than their male counterparts, women playing in the leagues surveyed are getting older. Up until a certain level, this process will probably continue in the years to come.

A second important trend observed in professional club women's football is the growth in the expatriate presence. While still below the levels observed in the most competitive men's leagues, the number of expatriate footballers in women's clubs surveyed is on the increase. In this case too, a further growth is expected for the next years. The diversity of origins represented in the main leagues should also go up.

Finally, as for the men's game, without corrective measures, financial divides between clubs both at national and international level will increase. The economic development will indeed benefit some clubs and leagues much more than others. The high concentration of full internationals in some clubs of the competitions surveyed already illustrates this process.

From this perspective, it is not a chance that dominant men's teams such as Chelsea, Bayern Munich, Paris St-Germain, Arsenal or Manchester City are in the best positions of the table of teams fielding the highest percentage of full internationals. In the top ten rankings, only Rosengård and North Carolina Courage have no professional team at men's level.