

Comparative study of UEFA Women's Champions League quarter-finalists (2022/23)

Drs Raffaele Poli, Loïc Ravenel and Roger Besson

1. Introduction

A new edition of the UEFA's Women's Champions League saw the victory of Barcelona in the final against Wolfsburg. Most of the players involved in the knockout phases will also participate in the FIFA World Cup, which will take place from the 20th July to the 20th August in Australia and New Zealand. There is no doubt that, following this event, women's football will pass a new milestone in terms of popularity.

This report is a comparative analysis of the composition of squads of the eight clubs having reached the quarter-finals of the 2022/23 edition of the UEFA Women's Champions League: Arsenal and Chelsea from England, Olympique Lyonnais and Paris St-Germain from France, Wolfsburg and Bayern Munich from Germany, Barcelona from Spain and Roma from Italy. To ensure the comparability of the data with that presented at league level, the statistics refer to the line-ups fielded in domestic league matches (up to the 23/05/2023).

2. Age on the pitch

The average age on the pitch for the quarter-finalists of the UEFA Women's Champions League is greater than that observed for all the participants of the five championships of which the teams are part: 26.9 years of age as opposed to 25.9. On the other hand, it is situated slightly below that of the American NWSL (27.3 years of age). By team, the values are relatively homogeneous and range from 26.0 years of age for Bayern Munich to 27.6 for Chelsea.

The age group of players between 26 and 29 years is the most represented in the line-ups fielded by the quarter-finalists: 34.3% of the total number of minutes. Players under 23 years of age only accounted for 16.8% of total minutes, which reflects their difficulty in establishing themselves in the very competitive environment of the top European clubs. The highest level was recorded for the unfortunate finalists, Wolfsburg (26.3%), which indicates a bright future for the German club.

Figure 1: average age on the pitch (domestic leagues)

(a) Champions League quarter-finalists (2022/23)		
	Bayern München (GER)	26.0 yrs
	Paris St-Germain (FRA)	26.4 yrs
	FC Barcelona (ESP)	26.6 yrs
	VfL Wolfsburg (GER)	26.7 yrs
	Olympique Lyonnais (FRA)	27.1 yrs
	Arsenal WFC (ENG)	27.2 yrs
	AS Roma (ITA)	27.3 yrs
	Chelsea FC (ENG)	27.6 yrs
	Average	26.9 yrs

(b) average, by league 2022/23		
	Frauen-Bundesliga	24.7 yrs
	Division 1 féminine	25.8 yrs
	Primera División Femenina	25.9 yrs
	Serie A Femminile	26.6 yrs
	Women's Super League	26.9 yrs
	NWSL	27.3 yrs
	Average	26.2 yrs

Figure 2: % of minutes according to age group (domestic league), Champions League quarter-finalists (2022/23)

	<23	23-25	26-29	≥30	
	25.4%	26.8%	36.7%	11.2%	
	23.4%	21.8%	39.4%	15.4%	
	17.0%	31.8%	24.3%	26.9%	
	26.3%	9.1%	39.4%	25.2%	
	26.1%	20.2%	14.5%	39.2%	
	3.0%	27.7%	54.4%	15.0%	
	8.5%	36.8%	23.0%	31.7%	
	6.1%	27.1%	50.2%	16.7%	
	16.8%	25.8%	34.3%	23.2%	

3. Expatriates' minutes

Almost half of the minutes in the eight quarter-finalists were played by expatriate footballers, i.e. players having grown up outside of the association of their employer club. Particularly high levels were recorded for English teams: Arsenal (83.2%) and Chelsea (74.5%). At the opposite end of the scale we find the two finalists, Wolfsburg (30.9%) and Barcelona (35.5%), which shows that it is still possible to achieve the highest results with a majority of national players.

The percentage of expatriate minutes is greater than 30% for all of the quarter-finalists and the leagues they are part of. This finding indicates that the internationalisation of the women's football labour market is a well-established phenomenon. The relatively low proportion measured in the United States (20.8%) is accounted for by the ample size of the pool of players of a high level trained in the country, as well as by the economic clout of NWSL clubs, which allows them to retain the best footballers.

All origins included, with 35 players fielded in domestic leagues by the quarter-finalists of the 2022/23 UEFA Women's Champions League, Germany is the most represented country among the elite European clubs, followed by France and Spain. In comparison to the recent past, we note the almost total absence of footballers from the United States (only two), of whom the best play at home in the NWSL.

Figure 3: % of minutes by expatriates (domestic leagues)

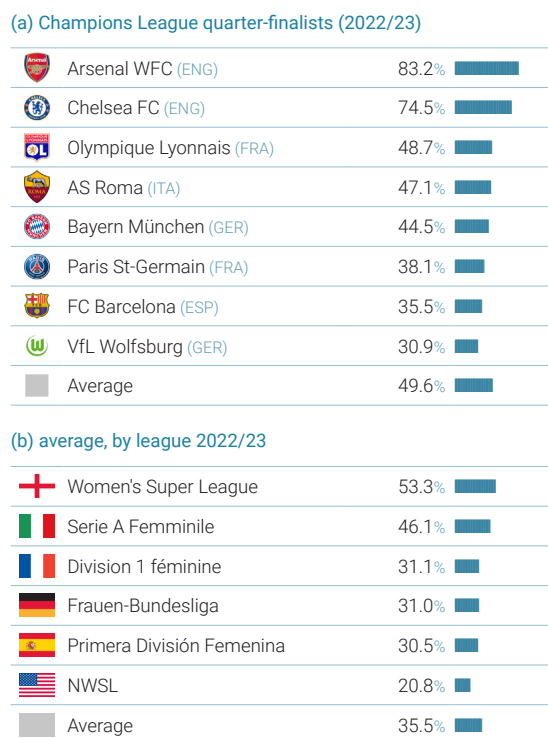
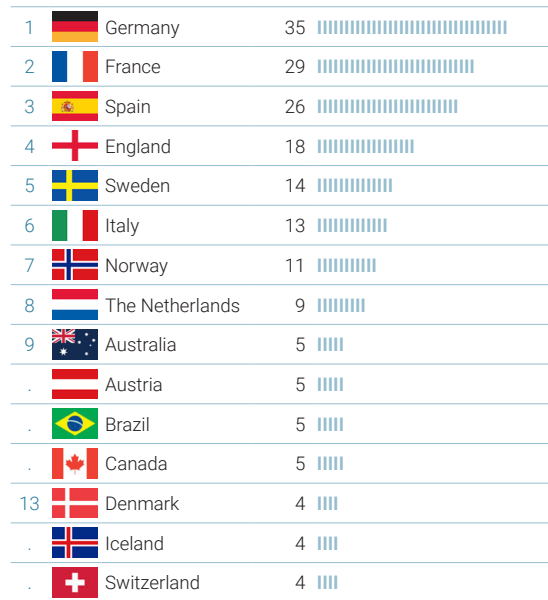


Figure 4: origin of players fielded (domestic league), Champions League quarter-finalists (2022/23)

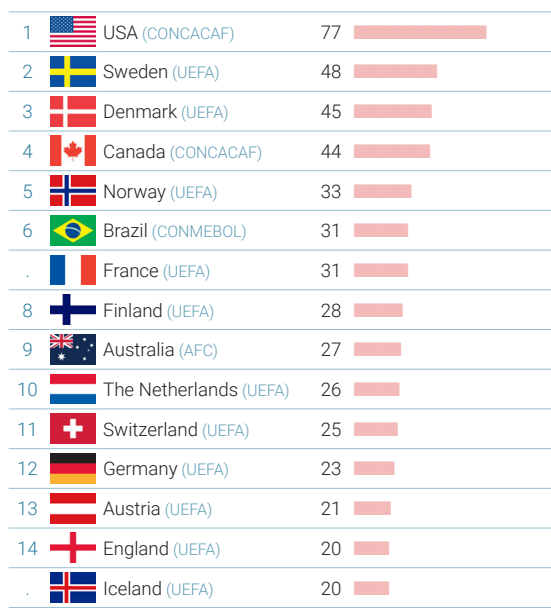


4. Origins of expatriates

Although not very present in the top European clubs, the Americans constitute by far the principle expatriate labour force within the ten most important women's leagues: the top divisions of England, Spain, Italy, France, Germany, Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands, Australia and the United States. The 77 expatriate Americans are spread out over all the championships analysed with the exception of the Dutch one, with a maximum of 20 players in Australia.

The Swedes (48 expatriates) are the second most represented origin abroad in the leagues studied. They are present in all of the championships, with a maximum of 15 in the Italian Serie A. The Danish complete the podium of the players most present abroad (45 expatriates in all of the leagues surveyed, with a maximum of 11 in England), followed by the Canadians (44 expatriates in eight leagues, 12 of whom in the United States).

Figure 5: principal origins of expatriates, 10 main women's leagues (May 2023)



5. Conclusion

With a new final phase of the FIFA World Cup to come, women's football continues its development worldwide. The internationalisation of the labour market for female footballers is already a reality, to the extent that almost half of the minutes played in the last edition of the UEFA Women's Champions League quarter-finals were done so by footballers imported from abroad. This level even reached 83.2% for Arsenal and 74.5% for Chelsea.

More generally, the percentage of minutes by expatriates is over 30% for all the leagues of the clubs that took part in the quarter-finals: the top divisions of England, Germany, France, Spain and Italy. These countries are also those whose representatives concentrate success at men's level, which reflects the taking of power of dominant male football clubs and nations in the women's game too.

Nevertheless, the double title holders of the United States remain the favourites for the upcoming FIFA World Cup. Though the best American footballers play at home in the very competitive NWSL, the United States also have numerous representatives in the best foreign championships. With 77 expatriates in the ten principal women's leagues, the United States are indeed the main exporter of players, followed by Sweden (48 expatriates) and Denmark (45 expatriates).