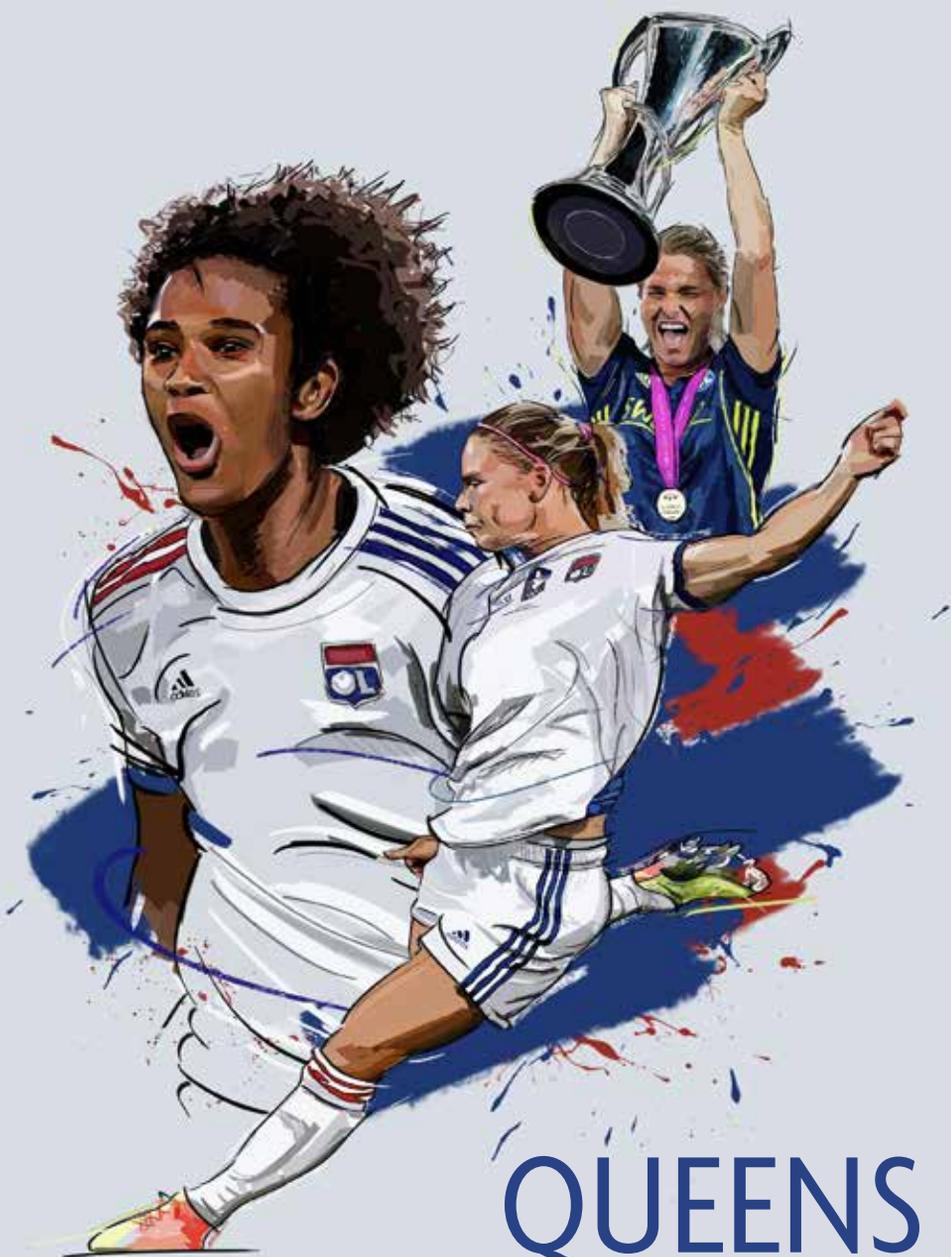


A B D U L L A H A B D U L L A H



QUEENS OF EUROPE

OLYMPIQUE LYONNAIS FÉMININ

QUEENS OF EUROPE

OLYMPIQUE LYONNAIS FÉMININ

ABDULLAH ABDULLAH



Contents

Foreword by Florence Lloyd-Hughes	9
Introduction	13
1. Building a Dynasty	17
2. Formations, Systems and Build-up Structure	26
3. Role of the Sixes	35
4. Positional Rotations and Final-Third Attacking Methods	41
5. Defensive Shapes, Rotations and Transitions	47
6. Pressing Structure	56
7. Wendie Renard	61
8. Saki Kumagai	78
9. Eugénie Le Sommer	94
10. Dzsennifer Marozsán	111
11. Delphine Cascarino	127
12. Amel Majri	141
13. Amandine Henry	159
14. Lucy Bronze	178
15. Ada Hegerberg	196
16. The End of an Era?	213

Chapter 1

Building a Dynasty

AS THE sun rose over the Anoeta Stadium in San Sebastián on 30 August 2020, there was a feeling of curiosity and intrigue that set the mood in Spain that day. This was indeed the day of the final of the UEFA Women's Champions League, between Olympique Lyonnais Féminin and VfL Wolfsburg. Whoever won the European title that day would in their own right set a new precedent and story for years to come. The feeling at the time was that this was the year that Lyon could be dethroned ...

* * *

History has told us many stories about teams that have dominated leagues and competitions for long spells. From club teams to international outfits, football is littered with an array of tales recalling how dynasties

were built. You have Real Madrid's *Galácticos* from the early 2000s, winning 11 titles over eight years with a team built on superstars. Next, you could look at Arrigo Sachi's trophy-winning AC Milan machine, which won an unprecedented 16 trophies between 1988 and 1994. Then there's the early 1990s to 2013 period, when Sir Alex Ferguson's Manchester United could be deemed as the most dominant side in modern footballing history with UEFA Champions League and English Premier League titles galore. What makes this achievement even more impressive was his ability to do it with different teams built over that period. His ability to create, utilise and rebuild was remarkable.

There are a host of other teams who have built a legacy in a similar fashion, such as Barcelona, Ajax and Arsenal, but one common factor between all of them is the dynasty they've built. In the midst of all of their success, there is one team that has flown under the radar despite having risen and garnered countless titles while being so utterly dominant since their very inception that there has been no sign of stopping: they are Olympique Lyonnais Féminin.

Olympique Lyonnais Féminin have taken women's football by storm and crushed all those who have appeared before them. Although there hasn't been a real contender to the throne, their performances are still

worthy of praise. All you have to do is look back at their achievements since their inception and see what they've accomplished. Seven UEFA Women's Champions League, 14 Division 1 Féminine and nine Coupe de France Féminine titles is no small feat considering their first title came two years after their revival in the 2006/07 season. The numbers speak for themselves, but to truly understand their dominance, one must look deeper into what's made them such a commanding unit. It goes beyond signing superstars and nurturing talent; the success of any organisation comes from within, and Lyon is no exception.

People know of Lyon's men's team, who have an infamous reputation for nurturing prestigious talents and selling them on for exorbitant amounts. From Karim Benzema and Michael Essien from yesteryear to bringing up the next generation in Houssein Aouar and Rayan Cherki, the production line of talent doesn't seem to stop. This all comes down to the vision of Jean-Michel Aulas, the owner and president of the football club Olympique Lyonnais. While he was establishing the Lyon men's team with back-to-back domestic title wins, Aulas wanted to create a women's team under the same banner, although this time he had a different plan. He wanted to create the equivalent to his own super team, dripping with the best superstars on the planet

– his own *Galácticos*, or more appropriately, Queens of Europe.

This project began in 2004, when OL Groupe, the parent company that owns Olympique Lyon, bought out FC Lyon and rebranded them as Olympique Lyonnais Féminin. Since then, he's not let up on his promise, acquiring the services of Camille Abily, Megan Rapinoe, Alex Morgan, Hope Solo and Lucy Bronze, to name but a few, in the early stages. This resulted in their early successes in the UEFA Women's Champions League and Division 1 Féminine titles. The current squad is still equally full of illustrious talent, harbouring some of the best that women's football has to offer. The lure Lyon brings is second to none and is comparable to the pull Barcelona or Real Madrid have on the men's game. You just can't help yourself when they come calling.

To start with, you have Ada Hegerberg, the Norwegian striker who was the first female Ballon d'Or winner, and arguably the best striker in women's football over the last five years. Wendie Renard came through the youth set-up and has become one of the longest-serving members of the squad, and even moved on to be club captain. Dzsennifer Marozsán has over 100 caps for Germany and over 50 appearances for Lyon, and is easily considered one of the best creative attacking midfielders of her generation. Just looking

at these three names, you begin to get a sense of the type of personalities that come through the club. From generational talents to homegrown youth products, this Lyon side has managed to balance development and ready-made purchases.

'A very important factor for us to continue being the best club in the world, we always need to look ourselves in the mirror trying to look at where we can improve year in, year out. That takes a lot of responsibility from us, the players, but [an improvement] in the direction of trying to improve in the way we think, recruit, and the long-term planning from the sporting director.' – Ada Hegerberg

Every year there is a need to reinforce the playing squad in the hope of eradicating complacency and keeping motivation high. Giving world-class players high-level competition keeps them on their toes and it pushes them to improve. In the last 12 months alone, they've brought in Sara Björk Gunnarsdóttir from VfL Wolfsburg and the young full-back pairing of Australian Ellie Carpenter and Montpellier's Sakina Karchaoui. While the latter two are young, up-and-coming players, Sara Björk came from a Wolfsburg side that has dominated the Frauen-Bundesliga. She continues the trend of top-

class players in their prime making the move over to Lyon. The most recent transfer window just saw Nikita Parris make the move over from Manchester City, and she has settled well ever since.

The project needed financial backing, but most importantly, it needed to be treated as a priority – not an afterthought. This is where Aulas has truly stood out from the rest and why he's considered one of the best owners in world football. Possibly the one common factor that came through after speaking to some players was the social investment he's made in the team as much as the financial one. Ada Hegerberg, Jess Fishlock and Katriina Talaslahti were all very complimentary and passionate when it came to the president in this regard.

'I've never known anyone who is that committed or invested in his women's team. [Aulas] is a game-changer. He's a top leader and all the success comes from him because he had a vision.' – Ada Hegerberg

'When you see him, he's always lovely – you know that he cares. He's not a president that is far removed from the [day-to-day] operations. He flies to our games and gives us a pep talk for all the big games. He has spearheaded the men's, women's and youth teams, [which is] what makes it special really –

he's just phenomenal. You don't feel like you're miles away from the head of the organisation.' –

Jess Fishlock

The first word that comes to mind when you read this is respect. He acts and gives the women's team the same privileges the men enjoy. This comes from the culture he's instilled at the club. From attending matches and giving team talks, to providing charter jets, VIP access in and out of the airport, as well as six-figure salaries, he has shown how a women's football team can operate and set standards on the pitch if they're equally taken care of off it. The outcome? A high-quality football team that has achieved near-total European domination.

Aulas is one of the main instigators of Lyon's success but more importantly he has fuelled the growth we see in women's football today. Barcelona have started investing more into their women's team, and their appearance in the 2018/19 UEFA Women's Champions League Final suggests they've come a long way. Paris Saint-Germain are slowly but surely making strides by investing in their playing squad, while the German giants of Bayern Munich and Wolfsburg are edging closer through some intricate tactical improvements.

However, the biggest strides are arguably coming from the Women's Super League in England with the

boards of both Chelsea and Manchester City investing heavily in their women's teams. Under Gareth Taylor, Manchester City managed to sign Rose Lavelle, Sam Mewis and Lucy Bronze, while Chelsea prised away Sam Kerr, Pernille Harder and Melanie Leupolz from their respective clubs. This is being written before the start of the 2020/21 UEFA Women's Champions League, but it is believed that these two clubs will be Lyon's closest competitors in years. Speaking to Hegerberg, she echoes this sentiment and believes that this sort of investment is crucial not only for the longevity of women's football, but also keeping Lyon motivated.

'This is a huge factor for us to stay motivated. We depend on other clubs investing the same amount as Lyon to keep pushing. I hope other clubs take inspiration and motivation from it [the investment] because we're all in it and want to see it evolve. I think we have a big stake in this but even with the gap [closing], we won our fifth Champions League title.' – Ada Hegerberg

Each member of the squad has been directly responsible for their trophy haul at some point over the past decade. Eugénie Le Sommer scored the opening goal of the 2019/20 UEFA Women's Champions League

Final, while Hegerberg scored a hat-trick in the final a season earlier against Barcelona. Bronze scored against Manchester City in 2018 to qualify them for the final that year. These superstars have delivered at a high level for years while other teams have chopped and changed their squads. The mixture of class and elegance is truly remarkable with key players remaining a constant in their success. Each of these players has done more than enough to earn the title of Queens of Europe.