

**“RIVETINGLY INSIGHTFUL AND BEAUTIFULLY RESEARCHED.”**

JULIE WELCH, FOOTBALL WRITER, REVIEWING *THE ROAR OF THE LIONESSES*



THE  
**PRIDE**  
**OF THE LIONESSES**

The Changing Face of Women's Football in England

**Carrie Dunn**

FOREWORD BY RACHEL BROWN-FINNIS

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# PROLOGUE

## A growing roar

ONE FRIDAY in September 2016, I was woken up by the ping of an email. I had slept in later than usual; I had been out late the night before at an event to promote my recently released book *The Roar of the Lionesses*.

The email was from an editor I knew, asking me to write the obituary for Sylvia Gore.

It was not the way anyone would wish to learn about the death of someone they knew. I had been fortunate enough to speak to Sylvia when I was writing that book; she was assured of her place in history as the first official goalscorer for England once the FA had lifted the ban on women's football, but her career before and after that was just as fascinating. She loved to tell the tales of playing on terrible pitches not fit for purpose, and the lengths they would go to just to have a wash after a game – splashing on icy water from buckets, or jumping in a duck pond if they were playing in a park. She was generous with her time, and generous with the stories she was passing on as an oral tradition to the next generation; so few tangible documents of her playing career survived.

Or so I thought. Her next-of-kin spoke to me shortly after the funeral; Sylvia had kept plenty of mementoes of her life in football, and they were in a series of hefty boxes. There might not have been the years of match reports in newspapers that she deserved, but there were videos, there were trophies, and, yes, there were some press clippings. A local university now has all the items carefully catalogued and stored in an archive bearing Sylvia's name, there for the use of any historian of the women's game.

I had known that Sylvia was ill; when we had last spoken on the telephone, she had complained about the sciatica that continued to limit her mobility. By the time that she received the diagnosis that it was not sciatica that was causing her so much pain, it was too late; the next I heard from a mutual friend was that she was in a hospice. I am grateful that I was quick to write to her then, to thank her for talking to me, but also for being such a trailblazer for all future generations of footballers.

Her death made me realise once again how quickly we were losing so many decades of women's football history. The thousands of women who played football during the half-century-long ban in England got so little chance to tell their stories; and even after that, there were decades during which women and a small number of male allies were running their own game, with little help (or indeed money) from the governing bodies. As the nation's attention turned to France, where England would go into the 2019 Women's World Cup as one of the favourites to lift the trophy, I wanted to revisit the state of play in England – from the very top back down to grassroots, from modern day to the invisible histories.

Like *The Roar of the Lionesses*, *The Pride of the Lionesses* is not a comprehensive account of everything that happened in English women's football during the 2018/19 season; indeed, so much is happening so quickly it would be impossible to do. (The week after *Roar* was released, the FA announced a

## THE PRIDE OF THE LIONESSES

major change to their women's football fixture calendar. I was asked by a football writer if I regretted having such an early deadline, and I said that I did not – the game remains in so much flux that there is a significant piece of news almost every week and no deadline could ever include them all.) Rather, this book provides a series of snapshots of the people and clubs at all levels of the game, showing the challenges they face, the targets for which they aim, and their ultimate achievements. Some of the players, coaches, officials and teams featured in 'Roar' also feature here; there are also always new stories to tell.