

Living Archive MK
Women's Euros Project
Transcript

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Today's date is the 21st of June 2022. My name is Mel Jeavons and I'm interviewing for the Women's Euro's project. Can you tell me your name and the year you were born please?

I am Bianca Luttmann.

Can you tell me how you first got involved in football?

My first experience of football ever was watching the boys play outside my house, um, and I was desperate to get involved. So, I was only four years of age. My mum took me to a local team which was Water Eaton Youth at the time which was just up near our local, our local park, um, and I joined them. I was the only girl in the whole team. I was the only girl in the whole league. But I absolutely loved it and they were so accepting. So that was my first bit of experience of a team and football generally.

And so what sort of reaction did you get from the boys when you turned up in your football kit.

In all honesty they were so accepting straight away. I think I was quite a good player so it was shock probably more than anything that I could play perhaps. I was so young as well and I was so small and blond that I just stood out from a mile away. But as soon as they saw me play they were so accepting of me and really encouraged it and I felt so involved in the team the whole time. I never felt like an outsider and, and they were so good with me, worked with me the whole time so it was really positive.

What sort of record did the team have? Was it quite a successful team?

It was kind of a youth team at that time so we were sort of only five or six years of age. So it was generally in that sort of age bracket where you're still learning and it is in for the enjoyment and you are doing the real basics. But the whole club had, had a really good reputation. It got loads of kids involved from loads of different ages. So the reputation of the team was really, really great, so that's why my mum wanted me to get involved and just

kind of get my first feel and so if I wanted to carry on doing it because you know what kids can be like: they want to try something and then a week later they don't. Um, but of course in my case that, that wasn't going to happen and, and I really stuck it out until, 'til today so yeah.

What about when you were a little girl with your girl friends and you obviously want to play out, what did they think of you playing football?

So my family and friends were always really supportive. I managed to get a group of friends that also kind of played football so it was, it was quite good for me in that respect. I think the only person that told me not to play was my nan. She told me she wanted me to do ballet. She always has still to the last few years. She told me I should do dancing. I've never done dancing so I have no idea why. But mum and dad was always really supportive. My dad, bless him, was getting up when I, when I got a little bit higher, was getting up at silly o'clock in the morning and working until 3 or 4 and then taking me to football training and not getting home until 10 or 11 o'clock at night some weeks. So they were always really supportive. My mum loves football. I'm from a really footballing family although none of them play, they all really support the games so I've always sort of had the backing from them which was really good.

So talk me through how your footballing career progressed then, from your first team to –

So –

Where you are now?

Starting off at Water Eaton, I was there for, for quite a number of years. I was there until I was 12 which was the age that I wasn't allowed to play with them anymore due to the FA regulations at that point; which has now been extended to 18 which is great.

So luckily, the summer before I turned 12 I went to the Rushden and Diamonds tournament which I captained the team. So had to sing the National Anthem in front of the stadium and everything which was really interesting. I got scouted there by the Rushden and Diamonds Academy Team, which I didn't know was a thing. So it was perfect timing. So they wanted me to go and trial for their Academy which is what I done. Obviously, I was devastated to leave the boys. They got me a big shirt and presents and stuff. But it was time to move on. So went to Rushden and Diamonds. I stayed there until I was 15, 16. We got to go on tour to America. We, I stayed with a host family. We've, we done Denmark and all different places so it was such a fantastic experience and a really successful team. I played with players such as Leah Williamson

who is Captaining the England team in this tournament. She was one of my players back then as well as Carla Humphries who plays for Liverpool. So really high, high-flying team. And unfortunately, that come to an end when the Academy had to fold. Some people went to Arsenal, some people went to various different things.

I went to MK Dons. I played there until I reached the Ladies team which was again absolutely fantastic. I've got friends that I made there that I am still best friends with now. So, such a great experience. The club set-up was brilliant and really supportive. So at that point I was playing for the Dons, the Dons team, I was representing my county as well, Buckinghamshire, as well as playing for the school team where we were really successful as well, winning every single cup every year. So it was really, really positive.

I then needed a bit of a break from football once I hit the Ladies team. Obviously, it's been quite intense throughout my whole life. So took a year off and then joined some local teams. So joined sort of Stony Stratford Football Club, MK City where we played in the Southern Region. Again, found my love for football again and, and really got involved and again found friends that I am now friends with today.

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And then a few years back decided to, to up my game again after an injury prior - I dislocated my knee. Up my game again, get my fitness up again and I now play for Northampton Town and have done now for the last sort of three seasons, where we have just won the Cup and the County Cup as well. So we're in National League next season which is really good.

Brilliant. So, does your social life tend to revolve around football? Can you talk a bit more, you know, about the friends you've made and the things that you've done aside from football, the influence it's had on your life?

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, from somebody that plays football quite a lot, I play quite a few days a week so sometimes social life does take a little bit of a hit. But I've got some fantastic friends and where I've gone from different teams I've then got friends that I can, I go to, like different groups of friends. so I've got my old ones from like Stony Stratford and things like that and then I've obviously got my Dons team and we still stay in contact now, so it is absolutely brilliant. And it's also good when you go to games. I'm playing against MK Dons and my best friend plays for them, so being able to play against her now is brilliant and, and we get a real good laugh out of it.

So social life sometimes, like I said, can take a little bit of a hit, but it is what it is. It's for the love of the game because I enjoy it

so much I'm willing to, to take that a little bit. But the group of friends that I have made and the teamwork and everything that football has brought to me is something I would never question. It is something that has really made me, me, so.

Brilliant. when, we interviewed some ladies who played in the '70s when it was banned. And they said they felt that the pitches were, they all had to play after the men and the pitches were all scragged up and, you know, not very nice, changing rooms were dirty. Have you come across anything like that or have things moved on do you feel.

I'm from the generation where I did see that but I am seeing the change. So I've had quite a few years where that is the same: we've gone into the changing rooms after the men and they are dirty and things like that. And it's not nice. We just get the broom out and we clean it as you do. But it's, it's definitely developed and I think the way the game's going now it has changed quite hugely. So I, I'm quite lucky to be in that generation that's seen both and is able to really appreciate that change.

We also do a lot within my work where we've got the women's "Walking Football" and stuff like that and we always make sure that they've got just as good of an environment for, for their session as the men do. And we really include them. So loving seeing that change at the minute and things are really developing. We are now given priorities. We're able to play in stadiums, we're able to invite fans and things like that. So for us to be in that situation now is fantastic and it's only going to get better, so.

I mean, what more needs to happen do you think?

I think more teams need to take the risk. I think especially the bigger clubs. Obviously there, there are the huge clubs now but the ones that can kind of trust their instincts a little bit and, and give the women's teams a little bit of leeway. I think showing their support makes their fans come in and support and then that builds it and builds it. Within my team at the moment with Northampton Town we have been given that support by being able to play in the stadium which has then allowed – we had six to 800 fans come and see us. I think the last game we had sort of 12 hundred fans. We now go to the petrol station and the people in there go, 'Oh my God you are from the women's team, I saw your score'. So they're already invested in us. So if we were to continue to do that, keep inviting the young children's teams and the girl's teams around the area, it just builds and builds and builds. So if all the teams can just take that risk and just kind of give it a go, um, and really expose their women's teams a little bit more alongside their men's, I think it would be a really positive thing.

Something else that's come up from a few of the other interviews about the, the crowd that comes to see the women's football, the supporters –

Yeah,

People have said they are a lot more family friendly and not so loud and aggressive.

Yeah,

Is that something you have found?

Absolutely. I mean it does depend on the game, I can't lie to you. We played the County Cup Final the other week against Peterborough United, our rivals, and there was some shouting going on you know. But it was quite a big game. But generally yes, a hundred percent. Women's football is such a family thing and we get so many youngsters – we've got two little girls that follow our team all round the country and they wear little T shirts and they love it and the family comes every week.

And that is the environment that women's football brings and it's, it's, as much as men's football's fantastic you do get the rowdiness of it and unfortunately that does put a lot of people off and stop a lot of people taking their young kids to games like that. So actually, yeah, the women's football environment is absolutely brilliant for that. We always welcome everybody. We always go and speak to the fans afterwards and clap them and try and get the kids involved as much as we possibly can. So yeah it's, it's a really positive environment so any families wanting to get into football or just want a day out I'd definitely recommend it.

Let's talk about the Women's Euro games coming to Milton Keynes. Have you got tickets and do you plan to go?

I haven't got tickets at the minute. I unfortunately do have training and pre-season coming up so it's been quite a difficult one for me. I did really want to go but I have got pre-season coming up which is, is kind of taken lead unfortunately. However, I am in talks with MK Dons at the minute and hopefully we'll be able to get some tickets coming through soon and then get involved a little bit more.

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But I do run a facility and we're hoping to be a training facility for the Ladies teams when they come across, so that would be a really positive thing as well.

And, what do you think it, it will do for Milton Keynes and football in general? You know, it's going to promote it I would assume.

Yeah. I think we've done a lot with the women's legacy with MK Dons over the last sort of year or two, where we've run various

different sessions. And because of the Euros, we've seen them build and develop. And we've got people involved in football that have never ever tried it before. So I think that's brought a really positive spin. As well as us obviously getting our city status at the moment, what a way to welcome it with a Euros Cup. So, I think it will be brilliant. It's brilliant for the local people to be able to see it. Obviously we see MK Dons play there week-in, week-out, but to see a women's team like this, on this scale, I think it will do absolutely wonders, not only for the young girls, but for the young boys to see that actually the women can do it as well. Um, and we can do it on a big scale. So I think it will be a really positive thing for Milton Keynes.

Brilliant. What about your, let's go back to your football career now. What would you say is sort of proudest moment?

I think now to this day, last season I was able to captain my team in the fourth round of the FA Cup. Um, which is the furthest I've ever gone in the FA Cup as well as Northampton Town, so we created history. To be able to lead a team and bring the positivity that I could to that game. We didn't win the game, unfortunately, but we was up against a team in a Division above that were the high-flying, and to put in the performance that we did and be literally 30 seconds away from winning the game and then unfortunately go to extra time. It's one of them moments that for me was unbelievable. I had my family there and my mum and dad and everybody. So it was a real proud moment for me to be able to do that. And then to finish it off winning the League and the County Cup this year again with my family, friends and stuff around me it's, it's been fantastic. So I'd say that.

Great. Have you still got aspirations to, become a professional footballer? Would you give up your job and is that something you'd like to do?

I think for me it's something I've toyed with over the last few years. I don't think COVID helped that. just prior to COVID I was, I was looking to kind of really push myself and get there. Unfortunately then the pandemic come along and everything was shut off. For me, now, I think my focus is to be as involved with football as I can, but I don't think to become professional is, is kind of an option for me anymore. I'm 27. I'm kind of getting to, to the end of my career and my body hurts in places that it probably shouldn't some days.

I think for me, I am able to pass on a lot of knowledge. Like I said, I'm playing in the National League next season, which is Step Four of women's football, which is still huge. If we get promoted again we could be going into the, the higher division of Step Three, which again is unbelievable. So if I can do that I will, and I'll keep going for as long as I possibly can. But, for me, what I can

give to other people in regard to football is, is, I think, my main thing. Like I said, we do the women's 'Walking Football' sessions and the men's and I get such a good fit, thrill out of that. I absolutely love it. They're, they're brilliant. And then we're going to do Wildcats and stuff like that, so young kids get involved. So, yeah, I think the, the time I'd need to be a professional is probably unfortunately not there anymore. But I think, for me, it's, it's just passing on my knowledge and skills and love for the game.

Could you tell me a bit more about the 'Walking Football'?

Yes. So, 'Walking Football'. So I've run the men's one for the last five and a half years. I've still got people coming every week that have come for the last five years and it's been an absolutely brilliant environment. Having that run so well, we did communicate with MK Dons and we kind of said we want to do a women's one, which again has gone absolutely fantastically.

It's just a slower version of the game, although I do tell people off a lot for running. We've got the men that think they're Ronaldo all try and run down the wing and we have to pull them in. But it's such a brilliant way of, of still playing if you can't. We've got people that range between the age of 35 all the way up to 95. And as long as everybody follows the rules and we go a little bit easier on the ones that obviously need a little bit more help, but everybody comes and get, gets involved. And the biggest thing for them is having a little bit of a purpose, but also they get a free tea and coffee afterwards. And they don't half love to gossip. So they come in, they have a chat, and they've, they've built friendships, real friendships out of it. And I think that's the biggest thing. During lockdown they were the group that hounded me the most to get back open, so it tells you how much they loved it.

I think there's a massive social element to football isn't there –

Yeah.

Not just players, I think fans as well isn't it for sort of, it's always another thing that's come through a lot of these interviews –

Yeah.

So good for people's mental health and things like that you know.

Yeah, absolutely.

I think I've come to the end of my questions actually. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me that I may have missed.

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You talk about the David Beckham Academy –

Yes.

Can you tell me about that?

Yeah, so, when I was playing for my school team, like I said, we won a lot of, lot of stuff. We had four or five of us that played for MK Dons within our team, so you can imagine in a school team that was quite a threat. We won a tournament. We won two tournaments which then allowed us to go and take part in the David Beckham Tournament at the David Beckham Academy in London. So, as you can imagine, school friends on a day out, we loved it. We loved being on the train. We loved being naughty on the train. You know, it was a, it was a real school day out. We went down there and we won the tournament, which was absolutely fantastic, which allowed our school to get a little bit of funding, but also it gave us a kit that we could wear for the new season. So, it was absolutely fantastic. It was such a good day out. We made friends there that, again, still to this day I still talk to. And it was just such a positive environment to be able to get out of the school and, and just go on a trip and just do what we loved doing. And to come away with the win again was absolutely fantastic and it's something that I'll remember to this day. Even though it's not there anymore, I still go to London and go, 'That's where it was'. So, it's great to remember.

I mean, when you were at school., I mean when, going back a long time when I was at school, it would just be not on the cards to play football. You played netball or hockey when I went to school. Was your school, did you play football at school?

Yeah, I was quite lucky to have a really sporty year group. It was quite a bizarre year group actually compared to what you even see now. We had a strong team in every single sport. We had girls that only played netball and then girls that would play everything. I still played in the netball team. Not as good as the girls that were there every week, but I would still help out and do 'cos I could. We had a strong netball team, we had a strong basketball team. We'd go to tournaments and win anything. So to be sporty in our year group was, was seen as being the best. It was seen as being the, the thing that everybody wanted to do. So, as you'd see it now or sometimes previously, women's teams or girls that were sporty would maybe be secluded a little bit, but in our year group it was, it was so heavily wanted and done by everybody that it was so positive. So, I was really lucky in that respect. And I also had a really good group of friends that, like I said, in that year we had a football team that was – half of us were in MK Dons together, so we was able to just go and absolutely batter anybody at that point. But it was, it was really, really positive, really good. And I'm just grateful for the year group that I had really.

And tell me a bit more about the MK Dons team when you played for them.

So the MK Dons team I played from quite a young age. Again, it was friends that I'd met in school and I went and joined them. And again, it was just such a positive environment. We had such a laugh and such a good time. We travelled all round, all round England. We were going to Watford and Cambridge and Lincolnshire and everywhere. And the away-days on the coaches are things that I'd probably say has shaped who I am. We'd have such a laugh. And it was that first bit of freedom away from your parents I think where you were able to be with your friends and kind of they weren't watching over you. So we'd have a real good time. Like I said, we went to various different tournaments and various different things. So, it was such a good setup and environment.

I had various different coaches from a lady called Marlese who was great. And she was so supportive when I first came to MK Dons. And then people that I still speak to now, coaches such as Dave Green and, and Charlene, who was at Dons and also was at Rushden and Diamonds with me and I now work with at MK College, so she's obviously been with me throughout my whole life.

So it was, it was such a good environment, the set-up was great, we had really great training. They set up games against teams such as Arsenal, which was such a buzz, to turn up and play sort of Arsenal. And I remember, I was quite a good player back then and I was in the under-14s and I finished my under-14s game and they took me straight over to the under-16s that hadn't finished yet and put me on that pitch. And I was like, 'Wow, okay'. And, and I'd just go straight in and do it. Obviously my body didn't hurt as much as it does now, so it was a lot easier. So it was just so positive and, and they really, really invested a lot of time and money and effort in us, as much as they possibly could when there were a lot of barriers back then as well. So, yeah, it was a really great time. And, and something that again really shaped me and who I am. And the friends that I made in them days are still best friends now. So, yeah.

And what position do you play?

[Laughter], I play centre back now. I've played, to be fair, left back when I was at Water Eaton. And at Rushden and Diamonds I actually became a goalkeeper for a little while, much to my dismay. I used to moan to get on the pitch every week, even though I was quite good at it. But yeah, I'm a centre back now, and I do really enjoy it.

I was just going to ask about the fitness side. You know, obviously, you've got to play the game, but how do you keep fit to get ready for a football game.

Keeping fit, there's a lot to it. There's a lot that unfortunately within the women's game we don't get that the men do. And we have to make sure that we are doing it in our own time. Even with Northampton Town now, we train twice a week and also we play obviously on a Sunday.

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The training's sort of for three hours at a time. So we have to go home and do our own recovery. We have to go home and do things such as foam-rolling and stretching and stuff in our own time 'cos we don't get time to do it other, other than that. So we have to really keep on top of it. As well as that we do different runs. During lockdown we were made to do two different runs a week and then done a yoga session or a 'HIT' session and stuff as well. So it's quite tough. I'm somebody that likes to keep myself fit anyway, so as well as training I will go to the gym a few days a week and, and everything like that. But generally I think the biggest thing is the football will keep you fit, it's the recovery that you do to make sure that you can keep going that's the main thing, especially the older you get. [Laughter]

I work for Milton Keynes College. and I run a sports facility within Milton Keynes where we work with the local community as well as the local Council to provide a space for people to come and play football and various sports really, this is the facility that I'm able to run 'Walking Football' out of, and we also do, like we have Leisure Leagues there, which is a football league. We do dementia-friendly 'Walking Football' there as well, which is something that we've recently started which is brilliant, as well as different netball leagues and different charity events. We do some charity games and things like that. And our Football Academy also run out of there as well, which have recently been able to, to welcome a female team. So that'll be starting in the, the new term. So it's a really positive place. It's somewhere that I've worked – [clears throat] sorry – for the last five years. It's something that I really enjoy, 'cos that allows me to see those things and, and really make them, them differences with what I do. So, yeah, it's a really positive place, '3G' pitch and, and, and a lot of people come to use it. It's brilliant.

When you mentioned about the men's training, how did it differ to the women's and, you were saying you didn't get enough time, why is that do you think?

I think within the county, the country probably, it's hard to get facilities, which is why the FA are investing so much money in different facilities. But as you create a new facility and have a 'four

team stop' , so, even as a facility manager at the minute, we don't have enough space to welcome as many teams as we can. So it's very, very difficult. Men's teams generally get assigned their own area, their own pitch and that, that's what they'll use. And that's floodlit and that goes all year round. And when they can't use that they'll have an 'Astro' they use. For my, from my perspective as a women's sort of team player, we've sometimes struggled during the winter to get a pitch. Which meant we've sometimes had to travel further, or we've had to do online 'HIT' sessions and things like that just to keep ourselves fit, just because we haven't been able to the facility. So I think there's still a lot that, that needs to be done. I think there's still a lot of space that we can use to fund these sort of facilities, which I think, like I said the Football Foundation and the FA are looking into at the minute. And there's a big initiative out there trying to build facilities that are floodlit that people can use during winter training and things like that. But, yeah, it does differ quite a bit, it's something that is a, is an ongoing struggle for us, but something that hopefully is going to get better soon and, and is getting better at the minute, so.

And do you think they'll become a day when the women footballers get paid as much as the men?

I hope so. In my opinion, I think it is to an extent all based on what you bring in is what you can then put out. At the end of the day the, the companies and the, the football teams still need to make an, an income and a profit, which is why sometimes they need to take that little bit of a risk. Sometimes it may cost them a little bit more to, as an outlet, but it will eventually bring more in. But obviously that initial side, it may not add up on the bottom line. But taking that risk and funding the women's team and showing the positivity that it can bring would, would be fantastic. And it is the way that it's going at the moment. So I definitely think that's coming. |There's a lot of teams now, I think the Netherlands was confirmed today that they're doing equal pay for women's and men's. And that was just confirmed today. So, as you can see, it is getting there. There are teams looking to do it and, and they are realising that it's something that they can do. So, hopefully a few years to come everybody will be equal pay and, and everything will be square.

[Laughter] Perfect.

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[Interview ends]