

**LIVING ARCHIVE MK**  
**WOMEN'S EUROS PROJECT**  
**KATE DAVIDSON**

Interviewed by: Mel Jeavons

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*We're interviewing today for the Women's Euros Project. Could you tell me your name?*

My name is Kate Davidson

*Can you tell me when you first got interested in football?*

I first got interested in football from about the age of five or six. Where I lived, in Heelands in Milton Keynes, I was surrounded by lots of other families and there were quite a few boys in the neighbourhood. So we used to go and play football on an area called 'The Green' at the top of the street where we lived. We would all come together and have a kick-around there, with jumpers for goalposts.

*The boys didn't mind you playing at that point? How did that go?*

No, they didn't really. They didn't really think anything of it. I played with them, doing other activities as well ... Go-Karts and all of that kind of thing and running games and things. I didn't really do a lot of playing with the girls and dolls and those typical types of things. I wanted to be outside and sports was a big part of that. So we always used to play together on The Green, like I said. And I also used to play football in the garden with my dad.

*Did your dad encourage your footballing ...?*

Yes, he did. We used to play in the garden like I said. He and my stepbrother used to take me to play football up on the playing fields at Heelands as well so that was really enjoyable.

*Did you used to watch football with your dad at home ... and your brother?*

Yes, absolutely. I watched a lot of football on TV growing up and lots of football videos. They were always in the house. My memories are watching Grandstand on a Saturday afternoon and watching the scores come up on the TV screen and the Vidiprinter or on Teletext. And I have lots of memories of watching football videos such as Brazil '70, because my dad was a big Pele fan ... and George Best videos from the sixties and seventies. Those were the

kind of players that I used to watch on TV all the time.

*What did your friends think about you playing football?*

My friends ... they all thought it was something different that I did and there were one or two other girls in my schoolyear that played football too but everybody seemed very supportive and encouraged me and they just knew me as the girl that used to run around in an Arsenal football kit.

*When did you first start in a more organised team and what was the team?*

That was ... I first started playing football for an organised team in 1991. That was when I was aged eleven and that was for Milton Keynes Ladies. There wasn't a girl's team at the time. A friend of mine asked me to go along to a training session at a playing field in Coffee Hall, where a team had come together and it was mainly women, who were aged, probably, between eighteen and all the way up to about forty or fifty. So it was a very big age difference and then there were two or three of us that were in the younger age groups.

They had previously tried to have an under-sixteen's team but there was not enough players interested so they allowed the eleven-year-olds and twelve-year-olds to train with the women's team and I was one of those. That's what we did at Coffee Hall.

Eventually we moved to Wolverton, to the Wolverton Works site, not far from here. That was our home ground in the end. I played for Milton Keynes Ladies reserves team. The first team you had to be fourteen-years-old to play in it and I was just below that age. I played a couple of seasons in the reserves and that was a brilliant experience with that team.

**0:04:56**

*Who did you play against then?*

We played against lots of different teams but there was lots of travelling involved. We played against the likes of Aylesbury, Dunstable ... those kind of places. Then we would go as far as Waterlooville, out towards Norwich and places like that to play because women's teams were few and far between back then. One team I do remember coming to Wolverton to play us was Arsenal Ladies and I was just below the age to be able to play them at the time. I was nearly fourteen but not quite.

*Tell me about the sort of crowds that came? What was the sort of people that came to watch? What was that experience like? Was there a lot of people or not very many people?*

There were not many people coming to watch our football matches. Usually it was just the parents of any players or the partners or husbands of any of the players as well. That was about it, not many people came to watch at all.

*What about the kit you wore and the position you played?*

The kit that I wore for Milton Keynes Ladies was a former men's kit so it was a hand-me-down kit to start with. As you can imagine it was rather large and we had red shorts, that were sized extra-large and also red-and-white stripey tops, with Carlsberg written across the front. That was the kit that we had back then. I would wear my Arsenal kit for training but wear the Milton Keynes Ladies' kit on match day. But, yes ... we wore men's kit. There was no such thing as women's football kit back then.

*So is there now ...?*

There is now ... women's kit. Yes, absolutely. You get fitted kits or ... some women do prefer to wear men's fitted kit but others like wearing a women's fit which, basically, means that it's sized properly for all different shapes and sizes of women.

*And what about football boots? Did they do ladies' football boots in those days?*

No. They certainly didn't do women's football boots back then. We ... I had to wear men's football boots and I used to love going to get some new football boots, usually around Christmastime ... I would get some boots and they would last me all season. And they would have studs on the bottom, not like today where you have moulded ones or studded ones or Astroturf ones. It was just one pair of boots that saw you through all year long.

*What about playing on pitches? One of the other ladies we interviewed said that they were always last on, and the pitches were all muddy and, you know, snarled up by other players. The men always played first and then the changing rooms were always dirty because the men had been in there first. Did you experience anything like that?*

Yes, very much so. At Milton Keynes Ladies we did share the ground with a men's team. We were fortunate enough to have the two o'clock kick-off on a Sunday. That was because the men had played on the Saturday, so you get the typical wear and tear on the pitch. The football pitches back then were not in the best of quality, so you were lucky if you had a fully grassed pitch at the start and at the end of the season, here in Milton Keynes back then.

*What about the record of the team? You know, did they do well? Did you score goals? Tell me a bit about that.*

At Milton Keynes or later on?

*Milton Keynes.*

In Milton Keynes ... we did okay. I don't remember us winning a great deal so I think that tells us a lot. I think we were probably a mid-table team. We used

to win occasional games but if we went up against a team from a bigger area, like Dunstable for example or Luton Town, we would get beaten quite severely. And I do remember the 14-0 loss against Arsenal Ladies. So that kind of thing did happen back then, just because we had a lot less football players to choose from here in Milton Keynes.

*What about the coaches then? Were they women coaches or men coaches?*

**0:09:53**

I had a mixture. It was a couple called Tony Blake and then his wife also coached us a little bit too. They coached us every Tuesday and Thursday and then took us to games in their Raffles minibus because they were taxi drivers. I have fond memories of those journeys, from away games, coming back into Milton Keynes and seeing The Point in the distance and the orange hue of the streetlights in Milton Keynes. So you knew when you were near to home, when you came across that after those long minibus journeys. That's what it was like.

The coaching as well ... also when I was a young player at Milton Keynes, at one point we did have a lady called Jean that came to coach us for a little while. At the time she was in her seventies and she had played a lot of football, and was, obviously, part of the generation that had been banned. Yeah, we had a mixture of male and female coaches.

*So it was quite a commitment as a young girl, twice a week and then every Saturday. Did you feel you were missing out on other things?*

I didn't feel I was missing out on other things by playing football three times a week and I also played a little bit at school as well. So, when I was in primary school I got into the school boys football team but when I turned eleven I was told by my PE teacher that I could no longer play because I was a girl. This was when girls were not permitted to play football in school with the boys' team and I was devastated. I didn't understand it at all. But I carried on playing football every playtime and have great memories of playing football with the other children at Bradwell Village Middle school.

*What did you progress to after that? How did you take it further with your footballing career?*

I also played in a girls' team at Stantonbury Campus, where I went to Secondary school and that was a lot of fun as well. Every Wednesday we would go around and play against the other Secondary schools. We had a female coach there called Nina Sweetland and she's still involved as a PE teacher in the schools today, in Milton Keynes.

Yes, that where I played until I was about sixteen. Then, after that, I had a short break from the game and then started playing football again at the age of eighteen, when I went to university. I was in Cardiff, at the University of

Wales Institute, and we ... in Freshers Week, I found out there were ... there was an opening for the women's football team so I went along to the try-outs and got in the team.

Then I had three brilliant years playing football for the university in the British Universities Championship. It was called BUSA back then and we used to play ... every Tuesday night we had training. It was from eight until ten p.m. on the Astro turf, after the men's teams, of course! It was the worst possible slot when you had a kick-off on a Wednesday afternoon at two o'clock. So not the best preparation but it was what you put up with then.

We also had men's kits as well then so extra-large shorts and jerseys. That was just the norm for women's football. But it was a brilliant experience playing football in university in the late-nineties, early-noughties. There was great camaraderie with my teammates, and we had a wonderful time travelling around playing against other universities and often got into the quarter-finals of the university championships.

*Did you feel by that time it was becoming more mainstream or becoming more accepted for women to play football? Again, people coming to see it and things like that.*

It was ... I did feel it was starting to come a little bit more acceptable. The reason I did feel that way is because, in 1999, I went out to the USA to coach football in the summer-break from university. Over there it was the done thing and it was the ... it was much more accepted for girls to be involved in the game.

**0:15:03**

In fact it was the number one sport for girls in the USA at that time. I remember being there and watching the Women's World Cup, where the USA won the World Cup and there were sell-out crowds at the Rose Bowl. So I was very much aware then that the women's football was going to grow and I just brought that enthusiasm back with me, to the UK and while I was in Wales, I just told everybody that I knew about it and was very passionate about it then. But just carried on playing and could gradually see the game growing. Yeah, I really, really enjoyed that time playing for the university on Wednesdays and also Sunday afternoons in a Welsh ... local league. Yeah, so it was a great experience.

*So when you finished university then, what did you do then?*

Well, before I finished university, in fact, I played for the Welsh Universities team in the British Championships ... the British University Games they called it ... and I played, representing Wales against England, Ireland and Scotland. That was a brilliant experience and my proudest achievement in the game was scoring a goal against Scotland. We did lose 6-2 that game but it was certainly worth it and, funnily enough, players that are more famous in the

game today, like Jane Ludlow ... who is a Welsh ... she was former Welsh manager. She played for Arsenal Ladies. She was playing against me for the England Schools University team, along with some other well-known people in the women's game today.

I didn't know that back then other than, obviously, seeing them ... playing against those very strong players but now, looking back, it's great to see the names that I have on the back of the T-shirts I've got at home with their names on it too. So, yeah ... very proud of that.

But after leaving university, I coached a little while in Cardiff, where I lived. Worked as a regional director organising soccer camps and after-school clubs. Then, in 2002, I moved over to the USA and worked as a club trainer in New England, in a small place called Salem, just north of Boston, in New Hampshire. That was a great experience getting to know suburban areas of the USA. I was coaching the coaches there as well as the community football teams. So that was a great experience.

Then, when I was twenty-three, I got promoted within that company ... Challenge of Sports ... and moved down to Atlanta, Georgia and worked as a regional director. Then I was responsible for organising soccer camps and clinics all over North Carolina and eastern Tennessee. So lots of travel involved, a little bit less playing of course and a limited amount of coaching but I was still involved in the game. That was a brilliant experience and, yeah, I look back on that with very fond memories.

*Was that something you decided ... you had to be involved in football one way or another ... as a coach or as a player or ... you say you were organising camps ... that was definitely something you wanted to do with your life?*

Definitely. I knew when I graduated from university that I wanted to work in sports and I would love to have worked in football. So this was a natural pathway for me and ... yeah, I was able to promote the game through the camps and clinics that I organised. Lots of girls attended those camps and clinics and it was just great to see girls playing football and enjoying themselves, alongside the boys or on their own specific girl's camps and playing like they always had done. Yeah, it was brilliant to see.

*Sounds amazing.*

Yeah, it was really good. I really enjoyed it.

*What do you think has changed over ... from when you started as an eleven-year-old to now, within girl's and women's football?*

**0:19:55**

There's been a massive change in girl's and women's football since I was eleven years old. The game has grown massively and it's a lot more socially acceptable for girls to play football now and girls and women are encouraged

to play football in all different kinds of formats. The game is more friendly and it's more suitable for girls now. Everything from the kits that you can get to the coaching and everything like that is more geared up to be more appropriate for girls as well as boys, which is brilliant to see.

*I had a conversation with our archive officer, who's a football fan. He said he prefers to go to women's matches. He said there's not the, sort of, aggression that you get from men's football. Is that something you've found as well?*

Yes, I have. When I go and watch women's football (which is quite regular) I find that it's quite a friendly, family environment at women's games compared to going to men's games. I watched quite a bit of football as a youngster. My dad took me to lots of matches and it was quite a male environment. There were swear words. That was shouting, all of those types of things but at women's football you get lots of cheering and encouragement. The odd, you know, bit of shouting at the referee or at a player but, generally, it's a really positive, friendly environment.

What I do find when I go to lots of women's games is ... particularly when I take my daughter along ... I find it difficult to find good toilets at the women's games. A lot of the time they're either in very poor condition or you find that you're queuing for absolutely ages because there's not enough of them, because they were probably built at a time when there was the expectation that spectators would mainly be men. Now the game is changing and the stadiums are being played at ... by women's teams as well as men's ... the infrastructure isn't quite there yet at certain places. So that's a little bit of a challenge that I found.

*What do you think ... what would be your ideal scenario with the ongoing of women's football then? How would you like it to progress in terms of stadiums and changing facilities and that type of thing? How far have we got to go, I suppose, with it?*

Well, I think that facilities is a massive factor in how we look at changing the landscape of football in this country and how we look at making football more welcoming for women and girls as well as boys and men and anybody else that wants to play. I think that, first and foremost, equal access to the pitch is really important and making sure women and girls are getting prime slots as well as the boys are.

I think then, from an off the pitch perspective, it's really important that there's adequate ancillary facilities ... so the toilets and those kind of things ... the changing facilities are suitable and, in my current role, as a delivery manager for the Football Foundation, we talk and we look at this every day ... it's part of what we do. One of the big things that we do from an off pitch perspective is look at the designs that come in for layouts of new buildings and ensure that they've got provision for female players, female officials, female coaches and spectators because a lot of the time now the mums and the grandmothers, for example, or friends and aunties are coming along to watch the girls play as well. So they need to be accommodated with suitable facilities.

One of the other things that's really important to me when I go to a game is being able to get a good drink, you know, a good coffee or whatever drink that you want on the day. So those refreshments ... and they just make it generally ... that's for everybody really. It just makes it a much more nicer experience to go along. That's what we always try to achieve at the facilities that we develop at the Football Foundation.

*What about the job? Is there anything else you want to tell me about the job you're doing now? And are you still playing ... yourself ... football?*

**0:24:47**

Well, yeah, there's a question. I am still playing. In fact, a couple of years ago I started watching women's football a lot more than I ever have as a spectator, what with the professional game developing across England and the rest of the UK. So a year ago I set up a women's recreational team in Milton Keynes, with a club that I had been volunteering with. The team is called MK United and we have an over-thirties recreational team. So, with my colleagues at my former post at Milton Keynes Council, we were able to get some great advice from women at the FA, that had worked in women's recreational football before or worked in women's football in general.

We have a session that we run once a week at Fairfields on the western flank of Milton Keynes and it's brilliant. We play friendly matches every couple of months against other women's recreational teams but, essentially, what it's about ... it's reframing the game and making women's football more socially acceptable for everyone.

The women that come and play in the team are really encouraged to play by their husbands and their partners and they ... we kit them out with women's football jersey and socks and then they can provide their own shorts, so they're completely comfortable. We're lucky enough this year to secure sponsorship with 22 Studios and so we got warm-up tops and we gave player's the opportunity of a women's fit or a standard fit, with the Nike tops. That was brilliant.

But, generally, we have a great time. We have coached over ninety women in the past year and we have about twenty to thirty women at training every single session. I don't coach that team but my husband does so we do that together. I do a lot of the organising of the team. The group have really come together and over the past few months have really bonded. They now take it upon themselves to meet up outside of our training and do additional fitness work, which is brilliant. Occasionally we go down to Stadium MK and watch MK Dons women's play, who we're closely friends with because they train straight after us at Fairfields.

So there is a really great up and coming recreational women's football community in Milton Keynes, which is obviously just in time for the Euros. I worked closely with Ellie Reid, who is the women's recreational football officer for Milton Keynes. She's done wonderful things for our city in terms of helping



to grow the game. Together we have this football community, where women play openly and enjoy learning the rules of the game and keeping fit and meeting new friends.

*It's amazing to me that it was banned. That women were banned for fifty years from playing football. It's crazy, isn't it?*

Yeah. And actually, just last year, it marked a hundred years since the start of the ban so to see where women's football has come to since then ... it's great. However, there's still an awful lot to do. There's lots of opinions to change and I think that, you know, the Euros in Milton Keynes is going to be brilliant for this area. It's just only going to get bigger and better and it's ... we are in a unique position in that we are fortunate enough to host some games at Stadium MK. We'll also have one of the teams possibly coming to get ready for a game at Fairfields, as a training base.

It's been an excellent thing for the city and, I hope, from then on lots of young girls and women of all ages are inspired to play the game and to get involved in any way that they want to because those barriers are slowly being broken down.

*Do you there'll ever be a time when women footballers get in that Premier League and earn the same money as the men that we hear about ... thousands a week. Do you think that's something that will happen?*

**0:29:56**

I don't think women are going to earn the same as the men just yet. I think that's quite a bit down the line but, even in the last few years, the salaries in the women's game have increased somewhat. A couple of years ago the game was not fully professionalised in England and, as a result, some teams were playing against others that were ... semi-professional were playing against professional. That clearly isn't fair.

Now, in the WSL, all of the teams are professional and even teams in the league below ... in the Championship ... are starting to be professional and it would be absolutely brilliant for Milton Keynes if one day we have a professional women's team here. We now have the infrastructure in place for Milton Keynes to have a professional women's team with the team based at Fairfields Sports Hub, in the western expansion area. The next step is to make those women professional and I think they would make brilliant role models for a lot of the schoolgirls and boys that are here in MK.

*The MK Dons Ladies then ... they're not a professional team then? I'm sorry, I'm showing my ignorance here but they're not ...*

They're not professional yet, no. They train twice a week and then they have their matches but they're not professional just yet but they have the potential

to be because they've got the access to great facilities and amazing coaches. When you're in area where there's an up and coming men's team as well ... when the system is in place for both male and female they've got the greatest chance of success.

Milton Keynes Dons women's team are not professional just yet.

*So how do they make that step up to be professional?*

They would require promotion within their league that they're in and a lot of financial investment and backing, which I'm sure the guys down at Stadium MK are working on continuously.

*Shall we just have a quick talk about the Euros coming and what you're most looking forward to about that ... the games. I take it that you've got tickets.*

Yes. I am. I'm very excited about the Euros coming to England this year. I have got tickets to go to all of the Lionesses games. So I'm going to Manchester, to Southampton, to Brighton. That's going to be a crazy couple of weeks ... for the group games. I've got tickets to go to ... some games at Stadium MK ... the quarter-finals, semi and the final at Wembley as well. So it's going to be a very busy month of July but I think that, with the Euros coming to this country it can only be a positive thing for the growth of the girl's game and the women's game.

The set-up from the FA in terms of developing a legacy from the tournament is absolutely brilliant. There are women's recreational officers in each of the host cities, like I said before and also lots of investment going into getting programmes developed through schools. Developing and retaining female coaches or male coaches that work in the women's game and getting all different kinds of diverse groups involved in football here in Milton Keynes as well.

The MK Dons Sport and Education Trust have a session specifically for Muslim women as part of the women's legacy and also they have a Pan Disability session so there's an awful lot going on as a result of the tournament coming to Milton Keynes, which we should be very proud of.

*As I say I didn't really know a lot about football until we started this project. I've learnt a lot, particularly all the different teams and what an uplift it's going to be to have the tournaments here in Milton Keynes so ... yeah, brilliant. I've sort of gone through all my questions so just for you to say ... is there anything else that you'd like to ... anything I missed in your career? Any moments that ... special moments you want to talk about ...*

**0:35:12**

*I was curious about ... you said you were in America. What was the reason for coming back? Was there a different football job available in the UK? I was just curious about that.*

*Yeah, that's a good question. Why did you come back?*

The reason I came back was personal. It was because I'd been away for four years and my husband and I were expecting a child so we moved back to Milton Keynes so that I could be near my parents and yeah ... so it wasn't a football-related decision. It was a personal decision to come back but it ended up being a great one because we both developed careers here in Milton Keynes. Within six months I started working for the Local Authority and I tried to get the best job I could in football at the time, working part-time with a small baby. So I worked in the Leisure and Community Team, organising the maintenance and booking football pitches out for community teams.

Then, gradually, went on from there to work in various roles for the Local Authority until, only last year where I was project manager delivering ... working on the Women's Euros, in terms of heading up the Women's Recreational Board and also delivering capital projects, which was Fairfields Sports Hub, where we delivered an artificial grass pitch ... full size, 3G pitch.

We delivered what we would like to call like a legacy facility associated with the Women's Euros because a lot of the legacy activities are based down there but it's really a clubhouse to be proud of, with gender neutral changing rooms, adequate toilet provision for players on the artificial grass pitch and also the grass pitches there. Now that facility, which was probably my proudest achievement or my greatest achievement whilst working for the Local Authority is used by both a grassroots club and the MK Dons Sport and Education Trust, who operate the facility. It's a really good combination because it enables the young girls that are playing for the grassroots club to aspire to get into the more elite programmes that are delivered by the Dons. So, yeah, that's a long answer to the question about why I came back from America. Sorry!

*No, that's great. As I say I haven't got any more questions but if there's anything else you want to say now.*

No, I don't think so. No, I think I've said everything. I've mentioned the Women's Recreational football and that's what I wanted to make sure I got across today.

**0:38:28**

End of Interview