

LIVING ARCHIVE MK
WOMEN'S EUROS PROJECT
Jan Emms

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Hi, today's date is the 19th April 2022, my name is Vicky Holton [and I'm interviewing for the Women's Euros project. Now, can you please tell me your name, where and when you were born?

My name is Jan Emms and I was born in London.

Can you tell us about your family and what your dad and your mum did as jobs?

Yeah, my family: I have two older brothers. My mum was just a housewife and my father was a milkman. I can't remember what my brothers did, sorry.

You had two brothers?

Two brothers; two older brothers.

So what actually got you interested in football?

Well, my brothers...I used to have a kick around in the back garden with them and then just the kids in our street where we used to live. Everyone just...in those days you could go out in the street quite safely and quite happily and we just kicked around with all the local children and that's how I got interested in football.

Did you go to matches? Were you..?

Yes, I was a massive Spurs fan, although we lived right near the Arsenal football ground and all my family and all my friends and cousins, aunties, uncles, all supported Arsenal but for some reason, I don't know why, I supported Spurs, so I was an outcast of the family for...I was the black sheep of the family. But yes, I used to go along and watch Spurs and just loved it.

So can you tell us about your early involvement in playing football?

Well, I started to play – and in those days, bearing in mind it's fifty, fifty-one years ago and we weren't allowed to play football at all and, although I loved it, I couldn't play with the boys or in the boys' team at all; it just wasn't allowed – and so I just used to play with the kids in the street and have a kick around and then, when I left school, I found a team in Luton – and I lived in Biggleswade at that time – and I joined this team – Harry Batt's

team; Chiltern Valley – and that's how I got going in ladies' football.

So, can you tell us where did you play and what kit you wore, that sort of thing?

Yeah, we played at Stopsley Park in Luton and the kit was green and white – white shorts with a green and white top. And...yeah, that was our kit.

And what position did you play?

I was centre-forward – I got all the glory; I scored all the goals.

And did that team have a good record then?

Yes, we were very, very good. We had some good players and there wasn't many occasions we lost but, yeah, we were a very, very good team. Yeah.

So what did you do after that? What football did you do after that team?

After that team? No, I stayed with that team all throughout my playing career. I didn't change clubs at all.

So, basically...tell us about being picked for Harry Batt's international team. Obviously you were already with him in the team, weren't you...

Yes, yeah.

Yeah, I played for Harry's team. He was passionate about ladies' football. He had...he could see the future. And everybody sort of said, "Oh," you know, "ladies' football?" you know, but he could see, and he was passionate about ladies' football, he loved it. And I played for his team and I – this is going to sound big-headed – but I was quite a good player. And then he just said, you know, he was putting together a team for this ladies' world cup and would I be interested in going. He said, "You're good enough," you know.

And I said, "Yeah. Absolutely wonderful." So, jumped at the chance.

Can you tell us about Harry, things like what he looked like, his personality, and why he was interested in women's football? And also, obviously, about the Chiltern team.

Yeah, Harry was a lovely, lovely guy. Passionate about women's football. I don't know why because, in those days, it wasn't heard of, but he just could see into the future and he could see that ladies' football would take off. He was very small and very

neat. Big, thick, black glasses. He smoked like a trooper – chain-smoked – but the nicest, nicest guy you could wish to meet. And he worked his socks off to get the team to go to Mexico. He worked his socks off and all he got was blocked...nobody was interested – the FA weren't interested, nobody wanted to know about it. So he did everything to get this up and running all off his own back. And he was a really, really terrific guy – a lot of respect for him, super guy.

And a visionary really.

Yes, and a visionary, yes – good word.

So have you any idea where this women's international team concept came from? I mean, we could actually introduce the fact that it was called the 'British Independent Ladies' Football Team'.

Yes, it was. Yes, although basically when we got to Mexico they all called us England and it was basically that because the FA just didn't recognise us. They said, if you go, nothing to do...we don't want anything to do with it, you won't be recognised. And, like I said, it was like...he was banging his head against a brick wall to try and get it off the ground and...I can't remember how he actually did get it off the ground but he did and so, although we went as British Independents, when we got there we were just called Inglaterra – it was England, so to speak, you know.

00:05:00

So, when you came together as a team, how much work was it to actually get you together to work as a team and practising and taking matches together?

Not too bad because a lot of us were local and...like, Leah and Chris and we all played for the same team – I think Gill was in another team – but yeah, we...you know, we got together for training and meeting up and practice and, yeah, we were quite a good...well prepared for when we eventually went to the world cup.

00:05:29

00:05:49

So, if you could tell us about the British Independent Ladies' Football Team and early practising and getting together as a team.

Yeah. Yes, we had to call ourselves that because the FA didn't recognise us at all, wouldn't recognise us as England or anybody, so we had to go as the British Independents. Yeah, and Harry got quite a few girls who played for Chiltern Valley at the time and then a few of the outside... – Louise was from Southampton, for example, and Gill was from Wolverhampton –

and he got us together as often as he could and we practised and trained and it just went on from there.

Have you any idea, in terms of weeks or months prior to going?

Oh crikey. No I can't really remember. It must have been a few months I should think, before we actually went but it was such a long time ago, it's hard to remember, you know, a lot of it.

So did you play in any tournaments with the team before you left for Mexico?

Yeah, we went to Sicily and we played over in Sicily, which was tremendous. Can't remember the teams – there was Austria, I remember they were there – and I think we played two or three matches out in Sicily – that was before we went to Mexico. And then, when we came back from that, we went off to Mexico for the World Cup.

Sounds thrilling.

Yeah, it was brilliant.

So were you friends...within the team, were you in friendship groups?

Yeah, well, you know, we all just...we were all friends together. I mean, a lot of them were so young – I was one of the oldest and I was sort of nineteen, coming up twenty, at the time. But yeah, they were a terrific bunch of girls. Everybody got on, there was no...you know, no back-biting or no favouritism, or anything like that. It was just one big happy family and the chance to go to Mexico was just amazing and we just loved it. And everyone got on with everybody and it was just brilliant.

So now, what was your parents' attitude to you going abroad?

My parents were very, very supportive. They were very, very proud and they were amazing. Like I said, I was nineteen at the time and was in occupation – I was in...I worked in a bank, who weren't happy about me going – but they said, "Look, it's a opportunity of a lifetime. You love your football. To go to Mexico City, playing the Aztec Stadium..." you know, where the men's football the year before had been played – the World Cup – they said, "Just go for it." And they were really pleased for me and they were very proud, as were my two brothers as well.

And, whilst you were there, were you able to get in touch with them, could you ring them or..?

No, because there was no communications at all. There was no mobile phones or email or anything like that. I wrote a letter...we used to write letters, wrote home a few times and I don't think...whether my mum wrote back or not I can't remember but just used to write letters.

Did anyone go that wasn't in the team, or Harry? Any of your friends or family go to watch?

No, no, none at all, it was just the team and Harry and his wife and youngest son.

So what were your memories of the flight over to Mexico and when you actually arrived?

Yeah, I can't remember the actual flight. We stopped off in New York, I think and...for a changeover and I was offered a job by an American...this random American lady who got talking, just as we are now, and told us...we told her our story and she offered me a job in her place, there and then. And then we changed planes and we got on this, like, old-fashioned plane to take us to Mexico City. And then, when we landed at Mexico, it was incredible – the TV, press, the lights. We came down the gangway and all the cameras were going off and it was just the most amazing reception you'd ever seen. We couldn't believe it, you know: "Is it us?" you know and they'd go: "Yeah." you know. TV cameras; it was fantastic. It was brilliant, absolutely brilliant and we were like: "Woah!".

Like The Beatles.

Yeah, like The Beatles, yeah.

So when you got there, how long did you sort of...where did you stay? In a hotel, or..?

Yes, we stayed in the hotel which the England men's team had stayed in the previous year. I can't remember the name of it but it was absolutely fantastic – beautiful hotel. And the staff made us very, very welcome and, yeah, it was a fantastic hotel, it was lovely – first class...um, yeah.

00:10:19

Do you remember how long you were out there for in all?

I think it was about a month, although I think Leah would probably know a bit more but I think it was about three or four weeks at least I should think. Although we got knocked out early on, they just loved us so much they asked us to stay and play

some more matches and so we did that. So it was a little bit longer, sort of three or four weeks I think.

So, um...I just, when you said that, it made me think about the broken legs. So how did you play more matches or did you play with a short team, or..?

No, no, we just got the reserves, you know, the subs in but, yeah...

So shall we talk...sorry, my own fault, I've jumped over here a little bit more. I was going to ask you about languages, problem with languages. Did you have..?

No, we didn't.

Could you say something like, "We didn't have any problem with languages..."

No, we didn't have any problem with languages at all. You know, the staff obviously couldn't speak English and we couldn't speak Spanish but there was a lot of hand gestures and everything like that and the people who sort of organised it a bit, I think they could speak English. The hotel manager, who took us into his heart, he spoke English. But there was no language barrier at all, no.

So before the first match, what sort of preparation did you do? Was it really hot, or was it..?

Yes, it was incredibly hot so we had to train very early in the morning. We were up at sort of seven to train for half past seven before the heat got too intense. And we'd go along and train, and then come back and then I think we trained again later on in the afternoon when it had... the sun had cooled down a bit. So yeah, it was like that.

So now we're coming to the bit about the broken legs. So, can you tell us about playing Argentina, with the venue, the crowds, the incidents, the dirty playing.

Yes.

Can I just...would it be better to start with the first match, which was Mexico, to get the steps..?

Yes please, first match, Mexico City.

Yeah, okay. Yes, the first match against Mexico City so, as you can imagine, the people were rooting for Mexico. It was incredible, I've never known an atmosphere, noise, the heat. The coach that took us there went underground and we got changed in the changing rooms – it was sort of all underground – and we all got changed and everything like that and we had to walk up this sort of tunnel. And we walked up this tunnel and the noise just hit you; it was incredible. We were used to playing to one man and his dog on a Luton park; to walk out to a hundred thousand people with the heat, the noise, the TV cameras and everything like that, it was just the most amazing...we just looked round and we just went: "Wow!" We couldn't believe it, the reception we got and...yeah, and that was against Mexico.

And then against...when we played Argentina, they were a very, very physical side, very physical side – as were Mexico but I think Argentina were a little bit more – and we got our broken legs – our captain, Carol Wilson and our right-winger, Yvonne both got broken legs, which wasn't good obviously; took the wind out of their sails a bit but, you know, it was just one of those things. It was bad tackles and two broken legs.

So...I've got the broken legs here actually, so I've got the...oh yes, apparently, I've heard that the football posts had got pink rings around the football posts and that the stewards wore pink. Do you remember anything about that?

No...[laughs]...

I just thought that sounds...

...I don't remember anything about that.

It sounds quite funny, doesn't it, really?

It was such a long time ago, you know, it comes...you know...

It's just funny, when you read things, you think, well you would never do that now, would you?

No, never, never. I can remember certain things and the others can remember... – "I don't remember that. I do remember when..." It was weird.

So you were away for about a month – we've already done that – so, your memories of when you came back to the UK – that would be interesting.

Well, we came back and it was nothing. You know, the reception we got out there and the TV coverage and everything but because we were unofficial we wasn't expecting much but we flew back and nothing: no publicity; no, nothing at all. Maybe the local paper or whatever, you know, but there was nothing, there was no: "Oh look, these girls came back from the very first World Cup, blah, blah, blah." Which it could have been; that's when it could have taken off. It could have took off then, if the men at the FA – the men in suits, as I call them – with this: "Oh no," with stuffy, "women don't play football." Though we're well ahead now, it could have been, you know, but nobody wanted to know.

00:15:15

And they were so angry – if that's the right word – with us. We all got these bans, which was ridiculous. Harry got banned for life, us older ones, we got banned...I got banned for six months, younger ones, they got banned for three months. But Harry's ban was just...it was appalling. It broke him. After what he'd done and all the work he'd put in to get this tournament off the ground, and the success we had out there and the coverage, and everything like that, to come back and to be banned for life, it was outrageous. It was disgusting, really. And it broke him, it really did. All that work and effort he put in. He had the vision of ladies' football, women's football, and to come back and to be banned. It wasn't so bad for us, I mean, six months, at that age – I was nineteen years old, coming up for twenty years old – six months, and the younger ones three months, it wasn't too bad but, you know, for life, that was...

Punishing.

Yeah, it was dreadful.

So, after you got over your ban, did you continue playing football?

Yes. I didn't play for much longer. I can't remember but I didn't play for much longer and then, you know, life takes over – husbands, boyfriends, children, blah, blah, blah. I can't remember playing for much longer after that. I'm sure I did but, because of memories of Chiltern Valley and Mexico City, I can't remember whether I...how long I played for after that. So yeah, it's all a bit vague.

So did you continue involvement in football at all?

Not really, no. I played...I think I played a little bit longer but, no, not like the others did. They continued to play.

Do you sort of keep up...or have you kept up with the other team...any of the other team members as friendships?

Well, we didn't meet – this is incredible – for forty-eight years. Forty-eight years. And then, all of a sudden – I can't remember how it came about, the contact was made – and we met again and it was like as if we'd never been away; never been away. And the funny bit about it was that I live in Bedford and when Leah made contact she said, “Where do you live now, Jan?” And I said, “I live in Bedford.”

And she went...

I said “Where do you live?”

She said, “I live in Ravensden” which is a little village about a mile and a half from Bedford. And that was forty-eight years. I mean, we could have passed each other along the street, in Tesco's or whatever but obviously didn't.

And then we all got back together again, which was a bit of a thing, 'cause there was girls everywhere: Cornwall, Yorkshire, Liverpool. But we managed it, forty-eight, nearly fifty years later and it was as if we'd never been away. We met each other and it was, “Oh!” you know. It was fantastic, it was absolutely amazing. It was really, really good.

Well Leah and we all made contact but there was two girls we just couldn't trace – Jean and Paula. Anyway, a BBC programme – and I can't remember the name of it but it was famous – and they all got us together and we went to this leisure centre in Lincoln and – 'cause some of the girls lived in Lincoln and they couldn't travel. They were a little bit older and they couldn't quite manage the travelling – so we all met in Lincoln and we were two missing and we thought, oh, it was a shame that we couldn't get hold of Paula and Jean – we tried everything, you know. And they got a lady who specialises in tracing – the BBC got a lady who was specialised in tracing long-lost people and they got her involved. And anyway, so we all piles into this place in Lincoln and we had the interview with the lady and then, all of a sudden, she said, “Oh look. Look who's just coming through.” And it was the two we couldn't trace, Paula and Jean. And in they walked and it was like, “Oh my god!” It was so emotional, it was fantastic and we just couldn't believe it. So that meant all of us, all together, after fifty years in this one place, in this sports hall in Lincoln. And that was really, really lovely. And we had a kick around and a little play and Lillian went in goal and, you know. We are old ladies now but it was fantastic, yeah, it really was.

Fantastic. So another BBC show that you've been on – do you want to talk about The One Show?

The One Show, yes. That was another really tremendous experience. Again, I'm not quite sure how that come about but we were all invited down to The One Show – Matt Baker and Susanna Reid and...and the Kaiser Chiefs were there, which was a bonus. So yeah, and he'd never heard of it. At the rehearsal, we were telling him this story, just as I am now with you, and he said, "Why have I never heard about this?"

And Susanna Reid was, "Oh," you know, "this is an amazing story. Why have we never heard about it?"

And we said, "Well, they didn't want to know. The FA didn't want to know – women don't play football; end of story, according to them," you know.

And she said, "This is a terrific, terrific story."

And Matt Baker went through and they'd got some footage of us all...you know, actually playing and some of the stadium what we all went round – we all marched round at the start in our uniforms – we all had a uniform made – and carrying the Inglaterra banner, you know, a bit like the Olympics. And we all walked round the stadium, with the noise and everything like that, and he said, "This is amazing."

And that was a really, really good experience, The One Show, it was terrific. And I think that opened up a few people's eyes, 'cause we got a lot of response from that: "Oh," you know, "why didn't we know about this?" You know, so in that respect it was really good.

00:20:42

That's fantastic. So obviously this is a very proud moment. If you look back on your football career, would you say any of the sort of moments that are memorable incidents, or..?

No, it's...Mexico City was...and I scored two goals in Mexico City – which not a lot of people could say that.

[Short break to discuss technical issues]

Yeah, so throughout my career, obviously Mexico City was the icing on the cake. Also I did actually score two goals on that Mexico...on the Aztec Stadium, which was absolutely amazing. I can remember one of them but I can't remember the other one. So I don't think...there's not many people can say – male or female – that say they scored two goals in the Aztec Stadium. So that was a very...you know, that's a memory I treasure and tell my grandchildren about and they went, "What!" you know. And so that was really, really good. And just remembering the whole atmosphere, the noise, how they loved us. We'd go out in a coach and they would be banging on the coach windows, trying to hand us flowers, presents... "Ah Inglaterra, we love you," you know, "you stole our hearts." And wherever we went we had to have police escorts on motorbikes because we were

just mobbed everywhere. And we went to the British Embassy; they threw a party for us. We went to the hotel manager, we went to his house – and he was a very, very wealthy man, with a swimming pool and everything like that. We spent a day at his house, we went to a toy store. Oh, there was lots and lots of trips around.

Tell us about this fabulous house.

The manager...or, the owner of the hotel. Yes, like so we got asked out to loads of places and he invited us to his house for the day and it was a beautiful house but I can remember the swimming pool there and so we all had a swim in his pool and we met his children and his wife and we had a whole day there and they...he really looked after us and we had a terrific day there. Yeah, and the other was the British Embassy, they laid on a party for us. I remember going there. Various trips here, there and everywhere, we was just so popular and we...some of the girls were on TV, the papers were there all the time taking our picture, police escorts wherever we went, on their motorbikes they had to...the coach. Knocking on the window, “Inglaterra, Inglaterra,” and trying to bring us flowers and chocolates and all sorts for us. It was just amazing and that...the memories I have of that will never, ever...you know, I'm seventy now but, you know, I will never, ever forget the reception we got out there and the experience of playing on the Aztec Stadium, which not many people, male – especially male – female could say, so that's quite special for me, yeah.

Wonderful stuff.

[Unknown] Excellent, do you have more questions or..?

No, I'm at the end of the list here.

[Unknown] On your sheet, okay. I was just curious about...what was the name of your manager?

Harry Batt.

[Unknown] Harry. So, do you have any more information or any knowledge of what happened to him after the ban? Did he go on to do other things, or..?

[Brief break to discuss technical issues]

Harry Batt, yeah. I'm not sure what happened after we came back from Mexico, although I know he was banned for life. I know Leah and Jill and Chris – the other three girls – they know a lot more about him – they've got a lot of photos and they know

more of his family and everything. His wife, June, and his youngest son, Keith, came with us – Keith was only ten at the time and he was our...like our mascot. I'm not sure, I know Harry obviously was completely broken by the ban he'd got but I'm not a hundred per cent sure what he actually did, you know, after everything but the other girls I know do, so you'll perhaps be able to get a bit more from them. Yeah, especially Leah, if you ask Leah, she's got a lot of...

Yeah well, we've got Leah, we've got Leah.

[Unknown] We've got Leah next.

She's got a lot of stuff on Harry but I think she left it in my house, or her house, and forgot to bring it.

Well, she can always send it to us. But there's some great stuff, fascinating stories.

00:25:05

Yeah, I mean, Harry...I mean, he was an amazing man, he spoke five languages, he fought in the Spanish Civil War, right, spoke five languages, you know, he was an amazing man, you know. The story behind *him* could, you know, make a film in itself, and so why he was treated like that, it was just outrageous, and we all felt so, you know, sorry for him. All the work and the effort he put in to get us...he got us sponsorship – Martini Rossi – they paid for everything. We would never have been able to afford to go to Sicily or to Mexico City. Everything was paid for by Martini Rossi – you know, the drinks people? Yeah, so you know...and Harry did pass away, I'm not quite sure how long ago he died but, yeah, it's well worth...

'84, I think.

Was it '84, yeah? So I'm not quite sure how old he would be but very interesting man. You know, like I say, he fought in the Spanish Civil War, for goodness' sake, and spoke five languages fluently and, you know, got women's football off the ground – or he could have done if he'd have had the backing of the FA.

That's fantastic.

Sad part of the story, isn't it?

Yes, it's very sad, yeah.

It's got to be said though.

Is there anything that you feel like you've missed in the story?

Yeah, we got measured for this uniform, very... 'cause, in those days, you know, miniskirts... very short, white skirt and – I've probably a picture in my scrapbook – and jacket and blouse and so we were all kitted out in the same outfits and then, the night before we flew to Mexico, Luton were playing Manchester United at Luton Town's ground so we all piled over to Luton to watch Luton v Manchester United. Harry didn't really want us to go but we sort of said, "Oh, come on," you know, sort of thing and we all stayed at Harry's house, ready to go to Heathrow – I think it was – to catch the plane to Mexico City the next morning. So that was... but we all sort of got these... and we usually were all in jeans and tracksuit bottoms and of course we had to dress in these very, very small mini skirt-type skirts and this very smart jacket, so we all looked the same, and so... we did look... we looked the part. *[Laughs]*

Did you have to take any other clothes with you, special clothes?

Not special, no. We'd got a tracksuit with 'Great Britain'... it had 'Great Britain' on the back, green tracksuit. We played in white, in all white, 'cause the green and white kit was too heavy. So we all played in white but then we just took our ordinary clothes, you know and just our ordinary shorts and t-shirts and things. It was very, very hot out there, I remember that, the heat. And, of course, being so high up, in Mexico City, the air was very, very, very thin and you were gasping for breath, you know, you'd climb a flight of stairs. So, to play in those conditions, it was quite... something we'd never come across. I mean, Val, our captain, I think she was hospitalised because she was so short of air and dehydrated. It was very, very difficult to breath. 'Cause I think Mexico City's something like two thousand feet above sea level, or something like that, so the air is very, very thin and we'd never come across anything like that. I know it was the same for all the teams. And it was literally... you were really... and the pitch was a huge... to us, it looked huge after playing on park pitches. Which, again, we couldn't book – because we were women, they wouldn't let us book a pitch in Luton, or whatever. You know, the boys and the men could book a pitch, so we had to play... and can you imagine what the state of the pitch was like, all mud and holes and everything like that because we couldn't book a pitch because it was for a ladies' team. Have you ever heard anything so ridiculous in your life, you know, it's crazy?

And you couldn't get a ref'?

Couldn't get a ref', no, you know because we just weren't... it wasn't recognised. So, coming from that and then, say, like entering into the Aztec Stadium, it was just... it was surreal really,

you know, we just couldn't believe it was happening. So yeah, that was...the air being so thin you were really struggling for breath even climbing up the hotel stairs, you know. Oh, there was a glass lift in the hotel – it's all coming back now – and we went up the outside of the thing and Leah and I, and several others I think, we got stuck halfway in the lift and I remember we had to be...they had to get the firemen, or whatever, come from top and knock the roof of the lift and then hoist us out, in the hotel. I remember that. I remember Leah being there as well but I can't remember which of the other girls were in there. So that was another interest...well, I don't know if it's interesting or not but it was part of the adventure.

00:30:04

Did you wear the uniforms to your embassy?

Yes, yes. Yeah, we were all...and yeah, every outing we put their uniforms on, yeah because we were representing, you know and we wanted to look smart and everything like that. And yeah, the British Embassy, that was amazing, the most beautiful house in the most beautiful grounds and I can remember that. And there was various other trips that the girls can remember and I can't remember so they'll probably fill you in on that. But you had to wear your uniform when we went on trips like that, on TV and everything like that. I remember getting up and I learnt the words of a Spanish song and they made me sing it and that was...that was another experience in front of the cameras and everything. So yeah, it was just the most amazing time in my life. I don't think I can ever surpass that.

[That's a lovely ending as well.]

Thank you. Sorry, I'm...it seems as though I'm waffling, verbal diarrhoea.

00:31:07

No, it's all good stuff, that's what you are here for.

END OF INTERVIEW

