

Women's football



FIFA Women's World Cup Winners, 2023

Women's football is a sport with a long, often unknown, history, which has significantly grown over the last few decades.

■ History of women's football

Women's football has been played for as long as the modern game of football has existed. The first recorded match took place in 1881 in Edinburgh.

Despite its early popularity, particularly in the UK during World War I, the sport experienced significant barriers. The English Football Association (FA) for example, banned women's football from its member club's grounds in 1921, claiming it was "quite unsuitable for females". This ban, which lasted for 50 years, contributed to slow down the sport's development.

■ Governing body and organisation of competitions

The highest governing body for women's football is FIFA, the same organisation that governs the men's game. At continental level, the same confederations ruling male football also govern the female one.

Competitions at international level include:

- FIFA Women's World Cup – this is the most prestigious tournament, held every four years since 1991. The first female World Cup tournament took place in China;
- Olympic Games – women's football began to be disputed at the Olympic games at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics;

- Continental championships – each confederation hosts its own major tournament, such as the UEFA Women's European Championship in Europe, the Copa América Femenina (CONMEBOL) in Latin America, and the AFC Women's Asian Cup.

As for club competitions, national leagues exist in many countries; in Italy, women's football teams compete in *Serie A Femminile*, in England in the *Women's Super League*, while in France they compete in *Division 1 Féminine* in France.

■ Rules of the game

The laws of the game for women's football are almost identical to those for men's football. The size of the field and that of the goals are the same as those used in the men's game. The size of the ball is the same as that of male football for high level competitions; however, in youth or lower-level female football competitions, a smaller and lighter ball is used.

■ Differences between male and female football

Despite the rules and the equipment in women's football being the same as men's, there seem to be some tactical and physiological differences between male and female football. Some studies suggest that women's football is often characterised by more technical **passing** and collective strategy, while the male way of playing is more physical and direct.



Why do you think women's football was so popular during the war?

passing: *passaggi*

1  Search for the following information about women's football in the text on the previous page.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The date of the first recorded match. 2. Where the first match took place. 3. The year when female football was banned in the UK. 4. How long the ban lasted. 5. The most prestigious tournament. 6. The year of the first edition of FIFA Women's | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> World Cup. 7. The first Olympic edition that saw female footballers compete. 8. The European women's football tournament. 9. The competitions in which a smaller ball is used. 10. The features of women's football that differ from the male way of playing. |
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2   Read this interview to Sophie Baggaley, a goalkeeper in the UK National Team, and answer the questions.

"Being a woman footballer in my time has meant I've been able to see a big change in attitudes towards the woman's game. When I was younger, there weren't really any women's teams that I was aware of. I used to play with the boys. Now, if you look at the young girls coming through, there is a whole academy system, there are female coaches, and it has all taken off in the last few years. Big business investments have started to happen, too, with people interested in investing in the women's game. This all marks a great change and a movement in the right direction, and it has been great to be a part of.

My main role models, as there weren't so many women in the game when I was young, were my parents – they put me first, their values helped keep me on the right track.

Football was, and probably still is, a male-dominated sport. I played football with the boys

in the playground at school and the first team I played for was a boys' team. I wasn't aware of any girls' teams until I was scouted. I think this is starting to change and the infrastructures in place for young girls now are much better, and the number of girls playing now has greatly increased. However, to this day there are discrepancies between the male and female game in terms of support, facilities, and treatment of players. We will continue to push forward and help improve the environment for future generations."



Adapted from: <https://www.ukad.org.uk/news/interview-elite-footballer-and-ukad-athlete-commission-member-sophie-baggaley-international>

1. What does Baggaley say about the attitude towards women's football?
2. Where did she use to play when she was younger?
3. In what ways has female football changed in recent years?
4. Who were Baggaley's role models?
5. Why didn't she find a model in a woman footballer?
6. What is her opinion about football in the past and in the present?
7. What is different from the past, regarding the infrastructures for girls?
8. Where are the discrepancies between male and female football still present?