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DONCASTER

FEATURE

FEATURE

# Belle on the ball

BECOMING CAPTAIN AT DONCASTER ROVERS BELLES WAS A PROUD MOMENT FOR JESSICA ANDREWS. SHE SPOKE TO EASTSIDE ABOUT LEADING THE HISTORIC CLUB AND THE RISE OF WOMEN'S FOOTBALL.

Words: Isabelle Holden and Rosie Brader  
Images courtesy: Howard Roe / AH Pix

**D**oncaster Rovers Belles holds a special place in the heart of its captain Jessica Andrews.

Established in 1969, the team, originally known as Belle Vue Belles, has held a prominent place in the world of women's football for decades, representing Doncaster, and the North of England in fine fashion.

The team currently play in the FA Women's National League Division One Midlands, the fourth tier of women's football in England.

To say they've enjoyed some success is an understatement. They are widely regarded as one of the most successful clubs in English Women's Football, winning the FA Women's Cup for the first time in 1983, and going on to win it a further five times since.

The true passion held by the young women fuelled the club's creation all those years ago, and that same ambition and drive still remains today. We spoke to Jessica Andrews to find out more.

## Where did it all begin for you?

In primary school I would always play football with my friends. When I was around eight years old, my friend asked me to come along to one of the games at the local football club. I just played along with the lads and I haven't really stopped since.

When I was 16 years old I began playing for the Doncaster Belles. Sadly, other commitments meant I had to take a break – education was the main priority. I was then offered an opportunity overseas, and moved to America for four years.

After I arrived back in the UK, I joined a small local team, I think I just wanted to try and find the enjoyment again.

I was initially a bit reluctant to return to the Belles. It was one of my coaches that gave me the nudge I needed. He sent me a text, and said listen, you're good enough, why don't you come and give the Belles a go again.

I took their advice and decided to give it another shot.

## What do you love most about the Doncaster Rovers Belles?

The history. It was always that hype

when I was growing up about the Doncaster Belles being the best team. I think the history and the name draws a lot of people to the club.

As a teenager, I remember the Doncaster Belles were always in the FA Cup finals. I remember going to an FA Cup final. I think the Belles lost against Arsenal, but it was the hype – it was incredible.

## How are the team doing currently?

Currently things are good. [At the time of writing] We have played two games, won two games, and the season has only just started.

It's a long season so it's vital we don't get carried away. We have the mentality of focusing on one game at a time now. This season we have a lot of new characters at the club. We have new coaches, focusing specifically on diet and fitness. We didn't have that last season so it's been a great help.

Our prime focus now is to prepare, both mentally and physically.

## What are your goals for the season?

Ultimately, the main focus is to go up. We need to be focused and prepared for every game. We are really striving for the promotion.

We don't get paid, so the motivation for the promotion is even greater. At the moment, we play for the love of the Doncaster Belles.

## What are your personal ambitions?

I want to keep developing. Currently I am the captain of the Doncaster Rovers Belles, but there's always ways to adapt as a player. I want to better myself both on and off the pitch. I want to be the best person and player that I can be. We have a young squad, and I want the girls to look up to me, as I looked up the players when I was young myself, just starting out on my football journey.



FEATURE



Captain Jess  
in action



**Who's inspired you along the way?**

Probably my mum and dad. I don't think they were particularly keen on me playing at first. My dad broke his wrist and hated football, and they had two girls so I think they were expecting a nice quiet life. But they both encouraged me to go for it.

When I started out, women's football wasn't as prominent as it is now. There weren't many girls playing. Despite this, they supported me, and they've always been my biggest aid.

**Do you think the Women's Euro win has impacted the game?**

Definitely. The impact has been huge. The amount of people coming to women's games now has grown massively. We played on a Tuesday evening, and had 260 people watching. It may sound low, but for the division we're in, on a weekday, the support was great. So many young boys and girls watching on the sidelines, coming down to support their local team, it's been truly amazing.

I really hope people keep coming to the games, showing their support for women's football, both nationally and locally. The talent has always been there, we've just needed the support. I hope it continues.

We can't thank the English Women's team enough. They've been such an inspiration.

**What has been your best and your worst moments in football so far?**

If I look at my whole career, my best moment would take me back to America. The set-up is completely different there but we won our league and we went to what's called the NCAA tournament,

which is a big national tournament – we didn't progress far but for a university that I think is the second smallest in the United States, it was a big achievement.

Obviously being named captain of the Belles it is such an honour and a privilege, to have that role and to be acknowledged by your coaches as the leader, so that's nice.

There haven't been too many bad moments. My worst was probably when I missed a penalty last season. If that's the worst I get I'll take it!

*For upcoming fixtures and ticket info, visit [www.doncasterroversfc.co.uk/belles](http://www.doncasterroversfc.co.uk/belles)*



**Remaining Doncaster Rovers Belles fixtures:**

|             |        |                                                       |
|-------------|--------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| 2 October   | 2pm    | <b>Doncaster Rovers Belles</b> vs Stourbridge         |
| 9 October   | 2pm    | Peterborough United vs <b>Doncaster Rovers Belles</b> |
| 16 October  | 2pm    | <b>Doncaster Rovers Belles</b> vs Sporting Khalsa     |
| 6 November  | 2pm    | <b>Doncaster Rovers Belles</b> vs Leaffield Athletic  |
| 20 November | 2pm    | <b>Doncaster Rovers Belles</b> vs Leek Town           |
| 27 November | 2pm    | Northampton Town vs <b>Doncaster Rovers Belles</b>    |
| 11 December | 2pm    | <b>Doncaster Rovers Belles</b> vs Lincoln City        |
| 18 December | 2pm    | <b>Doncaster Rovers Belles</b> vs Wem Town            |
| 8 January   | 2pm    | Sporting Khalsa vs <b>Doncaster Rovers Belles</b>     |
| 29 January  | 2pm    | <b>Doncaster Rovers Belles</b> vs Solihull Moors      |
| 5 February  | 2pm    | <b>Doncaster Rovers Belles</b> vs Long Eaton United   |
| 12 February | 3pm    | Leek Town vs <b>Doncaster Rovers Belles</b>           |
| 23 February | 7.45pm | Sheffield vs <b>Doncaster Rovers Belles</b>           |
| 5 March     | 2pm    | Wem Town vs <b>Doncaster Rovers Belles</b>            |
| 19 March    | 2pm    | Stourbridge vs <b>Doncaster Rovers Belles</b>         |
| 2 April     | 2pm    | <b>Doncaster Rovers Belles</b> vs Peterborough United |
| 16 April    | 2pm    | Leaffield Athletic vs <b>Doncaster Rovers Belles</b>  |
| 30 April    | 2pm    | <b>Doncaster Rovers Belles</b> vs Northampton Town    |