

Interview Abbie Ingham

ERIN CUTHBERT IS A SERIAL WINNER, AND IT'S THE HUNGER TO KEEP WINNING THAT DRIVES CHELSEA TO OVERCOME MANCHESTER UNITED TODAY

LIGHTING THE FLAME

At this stage in the season, do you feel mentally tired as a player or does the adrenaline push you through?

Last year I never slept a wink in the last few weeks of the season, honestly, but I'm certainly sleeping like a baby this time round, I'll tell you that. I'm personally really enjoying it. I think the minutes have been shared a lot more around our squad than maybe other squads, so I guess it will be different for different teams in how you're feeling. We've been in a lot of tournaments, but I think there are certain things and certain turning points in the campaign that give you energy and I think the performance against Lyon [in the Champions League] gave us a lot of energy. Even just going to Barcelona at the Camp Nou and being able to compete and show what we're capable of gave everybody in the dressing room a lift. We were absolutely gutted to go out, but we saw that as fuel to the fire to kick on.

How does playing in the Vitality Women's FA Cup Final compare to other games?

The experience of playing at Wembley is certainly a day to remember. It's a real spectacle, it's a big occasion and my family always come down for it, they've never missed an FA Cup game. So, for me, that's really special. You know, my mum described it as one of the best days of her life, so if I can give her that each and every year I'll be absolutely delighted. That for me is also my motivation to get here, to give my family a day to remember after so much they've given for me.

How does last year's FA Cup Final victory against Manchester City sum up this Chelsea team?

Resilience. We never give up when

everybody thinks we're down. And what a moment that was for me. I don't normally score a lot of goals, so that was one to remember, especially when it hits off the crossbar. That really is pretty good going. I was buzzing with that. Manchester City were really good on the day and when they equalised they put a bit of pressure on us. It went to 2-2 and extra time, and they had the upper hand. But one thing about this dressing room, we always find a way.

Do you feel like in games such as the FA Cup Final, you want to step up and be the player that makes the difference?

I would love to be the difference maker. I like to think that I'm one of the players who can take the game by the scruff of the neck. There are certain players that you want in battle and being from Scotland, a young girl from Ayrshire, who's had to work for everything, I understand, and I want to be on that battlefield fighting for everyone else. Emma [Hayes] has been drilling that mentality into everyone, we all want to be involved in the battle. We're all good football players, but I think when we talk about the fine margins it's who wants to win the battle, who has the mentality, who has the metal to give everything when you feel like you can't give any more. I think that the FA Cup Final last year epitomised exactly that.

What do you think you have learnt from Manchester United after beating them twice in the BWSL this season?

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and have had a very good season. When you've not won anything, you've got a certain hunger and desire to get there, and we need to match that as a bare minimum if we want to compete and win this battle. In the league, how close and toe-to-toe we've gone all season shows the quality of their dressing room, but mentally it does play a part that we've beaten them in both games. It's quite a good psychological advantage, knowing that we can beat them and that we've got that in us.

You're playing in front of a sold-out Wembley. Do you think your experience of big occasions will give you the upper hand?

Sometimes in games teams can play the occasion and not the game, whereas you need to play the game and not the occasion, and sometimes it can all be a bit overwhelming. There's so much going on, there's crowd noise and your teammates are trying to speak to you, and you cannot communicate, you have to have eye contact, you need to have hand signals. But a lot of these Manchester United players have played in EURO finals, and they've all played for their national team, they've all played in World Cups. These are top players who've played in big stadiums like we have. I've not experienced the EURO final like they have, so I'm sure that they've got a lot of experiences, just as much as I do.

How much will the FA Cup Final be a psychological battle to show an up-and-coming Manchester United that Chelsea are still the dominant force in England?

I feel like everybody has been against us this season, so it's just added fuel to a fire. I think everybody expects the winning team to slip up all the time, so it's our job to keep proving that we're still at the top and to try and remain there is probably the hardest thing. Having a target on your back each and every season requires you to adapt and change the way you play because everybody starts to figure you out. There are no easy games in our league anymore. Staying at the top is hard, it requires a lot of psychological training and mental toughness, but that's drilled into us in training every day, being competitive and being winners. Winning is a core part of our Chelsea team. We want to win everything and being able to refine and add every year is going to be really important to stay at the top because the gap is getting narrower.

"WINNING IS A CORE PART OF OUR CHELSEA TEAM"



Do you think it has got harder to win trophies and titles in England?

It is getting harder for sure, but it feels like the very first time. I still get the same excitement and the same feeling; it feels like I've not won the league. I am as driven as ever; I'm still motivated as ever. If I didn't have the same drive and determination, then I wouldn't be at this football club anymore. I still feel that I've got more to give, and I still feel like the little flame inside me is still lit.

Do you think you are going into the Cup Final as favourites?

I think we go into the game as two teams who are very evenly matched, if I'm honest. I don't know if there is a favourite because both teams have been performing very well this season. I respect United. I think what they've done is brilliant, their resilience to bounce back from last year when they just missed out in the Champions League and to want to grow is amazing. But I also think we've picked up a bit of momentum in the Champions League and having those games, using the energy. I think it's difficult to say if there is a favourite because I think it's two teams who are fairly evenly matched, with the difference of a fine margin or individual brilliance on the day.

