

# FINAL

VITALITY WOMEN'S FA CUP

2023



CHELSEA

v

MANCHESTER  
UNITED



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2.30PM, SUNDAY 14 MAY 2023  
WEMBLEY STADIUM, CONNECTED BY EE

£5



A full-page photograph of Katie Zelem, a Manchester United player, looking off to the side. She is wearing a black Manchester United training jacket with red and white stripes on the sleeves. The jacket features the Adidas logo on the left chest and the Manchester United crest on the right chest. Her hair is tied back in a ponytail.

**“WE’LL ALL BE  
LIKE THE LITTLE  
GIRL VERSIONS OF  
OURSELVES WALKING  
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WEMBLEY PITCH”**

KATIE ZELEM HAS GROWN UP WITH MANCHESTER UNITED. TODAY MARKS THE CULMINATION OF THE CLUB’S RISE, BUT SHE SAYS THIS IS JUST THE BEGINNING...





**A**s a Manchester girl, is it a special feeling for you to be able to captain your hometown club in a Vitality Women's FA Cup Final?

Yeah, amazing. I think in previous years, we haven't had too much success in the FA Cup. So, for us, it's something we've always strived for. Obviously, getting into the semi-final was making history for the club and one step further to the Final. So, to captain the girls out, at Wembley, the rest of the girls are just so excited to represent the club and be there.

**Can you sum up the journey from supporting Manchester United to captaining them in an FA Cup Final?**

Yeah, it's crazy. I think just from joining the women's team, it's been five years and it feels like it's been forever. It literally feels like the only club I've been at, and it has flown by. I was eight when I first signed for Manchester United, and we used to do the flag bearing in the Champions League, walking out at Old Trafford full of 75,000 people and waiving the UEFA flag around. If I look back then, going to the Cliff and training with all the girls, who are still some really good friends of mine now... the likes of Millie [Turner] and [Ella] Tooney came through the Centre of Excellence too, so signing for Manchester United as such a small kid to nearly 20 years later, captaining them at Wembley, is amazing.

**The women's team didn't exist when you were young. How proud do you feel to be a part of this team now, with young players that now have this pathway looking up to you?**

That's something that I'm most proud of, no matter how much we win, what trophies we win. It's such a proud feeling knowing that we can inspire the next generation. I think there are so many little girls and boys now at the stadiums with our names on the back of their shirts. Whenever I'm in town or shopping or getting some food, there are people that recognise you. I think it shows how far the game has come. When I was younger and started playing, I didn't really have any female role models. The game wasn't on TV and now it's so much more accessible. I think there are people that can look up to us and want to be like us and follow in our footsteps. For them to have the pathway to come through which makes it much easier for them is amazing.

**What would it mean to you to become the first Manchester United captain to lead their team to an FA Cup Final victory?**

I've had so many amazing memories so far. So, this will be another one added to the list for not just me, but my friends and family who are making the trip down to Wembley. It's important for me that I'm making everyone else proud too and





inspiring the younger generation. Not only to inspire the younger generation, but the people that have come before us, I think people forget how long women's football has been around. The Dick Kerr Ladies who played all those years ago were the real trailblazers for women's football. It's so important for the women that aren't playing anymore who set the foundations for where we are now.

**When was the first time you went to Wembley?**

My dad played at the old Wembley in a Cup final. I wasn't actually alive. He was at Macclesfield. My dad and his twin were both professional footballers. That was my dad's career highlight for sure. If you ever get the chance to meet him, I'm sure he'll tell you that he played at Wembley. Unfortunately, they got beat, so hopefully, it'll be a different outcome for us. But as soon as we made it to Wembley, he texted me saying 'you're always copying me'!

**Can you sum up the journey you've had as a team?**

Yeah, it's a bit surreal. When I first signed five years ago, everyone came from different backgrounds, different experiences. For me, it was my childhood club, but I just won the league and got into the Champions League at Juventus, so it was a huge gamble for me to come back and play in the Championship and for the likes of Alex Greenwood too, who then went to Lyon. I actually did an interview with Leah [Galton] and she'd stopped playing football completely. So, everyone was in really different circumstances. If you look back to where we were then to where we are now, it's a crazy journey. We've certainly come on leaps and bounds, from being at Leigh [Sports Village] with some girls that had never played full time or had professional contracts to now being at this stage of the season competing for the double, I think it's almost immeasurable. I'm so proud to have been a part of the whole journey. There are like four or five originals left, I think, and it's a bond that we will always share. We've been there through it all and I think that's so special.



Zelem says this season is the turning point in the Manchester United story

Rachel [Williams] came on and scored the winner and so did Millie the other day. It's important for us that everyone is valued in the team, and we know the importance of the squad.

**Will you prepare differently for the Final compared to a game in the BWSL?**

I think it's vital that we just take it like another game. That's how we've approached the whole season and that's why we're in the position we're now in. It's really a cliché, but we are focusing on every single game at a time. We know that Chelsea are a good team and we need to be at our top level to perform against them, but I think it's important that we relax and play it like any another game.

**Your performances against Chelsea have improved over time. Does this give you confidence going into today?**  
We try not to talk about the 6-1

**“THIS IS JUST A  
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result, but definitely, every time we play Chelsea, we've improved. We know what they're about. They're a team that doesn't mind not having the ball, they're defensively organised and they've got the threat in behind with Sam Kerr on the counterattack. We know what their threats are now. I've said it a lot of times throughout the season, but it's about confidence and belief. I think that's why we're doing well this year. We genuinely believe we can win every game.

#### What does this Final mean for United in the future?

This is just a baseline of where we want to be. We've always said that we want to be in the Champions League, and we've always been close, but not close enough. I think this is the turning season that everyone will look back on. It used to be the top three and Manchester United, and now it's solidly a top four. We know we can compete. We know we can win things, so this is a baseline, and we only want to improve from here.

#### You have got a lot of last-minute winners in the BWSL this season. Is this something you work on in training?

'Fergie time' is what we used to call that at Manchester United. I think that the Arsenal game at the Emirates was a turning point, these things don't happen by accident. It's not something that you can overly practise in training, but when it happens once it starts happening again. It becomes less of a coincidence. You make your own luck. People will say we're lucky, but I think we work hard for that moment. We work hard to keep the pressure on a team and create chances and then it's about taking them.



Captain Zelem wants Manchester United to be playing in Europe

#### How do you think that you've developed as a leader?

If I'm bringing energy, I'm hoping everyone else is bringing energy. I think it's a knock-on effect. Not just me, but for players with more experience in the team, whatever you do carries across the team, especially for the younger players, people who haven't been in these situations as much. I want to let them know that they can make mistakes, it's just about them being themselves and putting everything in for the team.

#### What does it mean to you to see the fans at Wembley?

Since we started the team five years ago, the fans have been sensational. You've seen how fast the Wembley tickets sold out and they were all wanting more tickets. It's going to be an amazing atmosphere. Whether it's home or away, they always make the journey, and we can always hear them. They really are our 12th player on the pitch.

#### Do you have any nerves in the run-up to games like this?

I think it wouldn't be normal if you didn't get a little bit nervous. It's now the business end of the season so nerves have increased. Pressure has increased with what we want to achieve, but it's good to be a bit nervous. You don't want to feel too settled, you want to feel like you're still excited, like I was 20 years ago playing for Manchester United. We'll all be like the little girl versions of ourselves walking out on that Wembley pitch.

#### How would you and the team celebrate an FA Cup victory?

We've got Manchester City the week after and, it sounds so boring and cliché, but we've got the summer to celebrate. We really want to win the FA Cup, but also, we want to win the BWSL, so our focus is straight back onto City. Then hopefully, after the Liverpool game, we'll be celebrating the double instead.