

WSL ROUND-UP

BUNNY'S GOALS SEE CITY JUMP TO TOP OF TABLE

Blues start 2026 in pole position after Chelsea's shock defeat

BY ELEANOR NOBBS

JUST as many of us are beginning to emerge from a Christmas-induced hibernation, the Barclays WSL is getting ready to return from the festive break.

December saw more turkey than football, but that was not before two action-packed weeks of fixtures.

Chelsea lost for the first time in 585 days, Manchester City enjoyed their best-ever start to a top-flight season, and there was one major change in the standings as Arsenal overtook Manchester United to take charge of the final Champions League spot.

Topping the table at Christmas was the perfect gift for leaders **Manchester City**, who scored nine goals in

two dominant victories to extend their 10-game winning streak.

Bunny Shaw has been in fine form for the Citizens, scoring six and becoming the first women's player to score 100 goals for the club in the professional era.

Two of these came in City's 3-0 win against Leicester at the King Power Stadium.

It was a game of two halves for Andrée Jeglertz's side, who enjoyed the bulk of possession and 14 shots in the first half, but failed to convert that dominance into goals.

Shaw proved the difference after the break with her double, and an injury-time strike for Kerolin sealed the deal for City.

The goal rout continued in their 6-1 win over Aston Villa

at the Joie Stadium, with Shaw netting four of them. The match also saw a first appearance for captain Alex Greenwood since a knee injury in October.

So City headed into Christmas with a six-point cushion on second-placed **Chelsea**, who suffered their first league loss since May 2024 in a 1-0 defeat to Everton.

Honoka Hayashi's 12th-minute goal made it far from a festive celebration for the Londoners, who struggled against an Everton side fighting for safety in 10th place.

Sonia Bompastor's team bounced back with a 3-0 shutout of Brighton & Hove Albion at the Broadfield Stadium to halt their four-game winless run.

But their first loss of the WSL season leaves the defending champions facing a battle to close the gap on City.

Arsenal enjoyed the best fortunes of the December period as they leapfrogged Manchester United to reclaim the coveted final Champions League position.

Super-sub Stina Blackstenius hit a last-minute winner to give the Gunners a hard-fought 2-1 win over Liverpool at the Emirates Stadium.

After converting just two of 19 shots, Renee Slegers' side were lucky to escape with three points against the bottom-placed team.

The following week's 3-1 win at Everton was much more clinical, with goals from Katie McCabe, Alessia Russo and substitute Olivia Smith.

And there was further reason to celebrate for the Gunners as England captain Leah Williamson saw her first minutes since picking up a knee injury during



the Lionesses' Euro 2025 win in July.

Manchester United will have looked to regroup over the holiday season having fallen to fourth.

The Red Devils trail the Gunners by

a point after missing out on victory in an entertaining 3-3 draw with Tottenham Hotspur.

It was not all negatives for Marc Skinner's side, however, as they showed true grit to fight back from three goals down with two strikes from Fridolina Rolfo and one from Ella Toone.

They had beaten West Ham 2-1 the week before with goals from Elisabeth Terland and Dominique Janssen, and remain very much in contention for Champions League qualification.

But **Tottenham** are hot on United's heels, sitting just one point below in fifth.

Spurs were rewarded for their fine first-half performance in the 3-3 draw - which saw goals from Beth England, Evelina Summanen and Martha Thomas, with a valuable point, meaning they've now eclipsed their 2024-25 season total.



YUI MOK/PA WIRE

Honoka Hayashi scores Everton's winner against Chelsea and, left, is mobbed at the end of the game

It's been an exciting start for Martin Ho's squad, who beat Aston Villa 2-1 with a dramatic comeback in their first December fixture.

After going 1-0 down in the 84th minute, England's header and Olivia Holdt's 95th-minute winner gave Spurs the advantage over 10-woman Villa.

Tottenham's neighbours, **London City Lionesses**, endured a disappointing December which led to the shock departure of their manager Jocelyn Prêcheur.

They lost their last two matches 1-0, against Brighton & Hove Albion and Leicester City, leaving owner Michelle Kang feeling a change of direction was required.

While there were problems to be solved, the newly-promoted side seemed to be on the right track, with London City taking 14 shots to Brighton's eight, Kiko Seike's sixth-minute strike proving the difference between the

sides. It was a similar story for the London team against Leicester, with Shannon O'Brien's second-half goal separating the two.

Kosovare Asllani almost scored a last-second equaliser, but her 96th-minute penalty was saved by Janina Leitzig.

The club have now appointed Spanish coach Eder Maestre as their new manager after he parted company with CD Tenerife Femenino in December. The 39-year-old is viewed as a future world-class coach with a strong Spanish style which London City want to implement.

One team who will be watching closely how the managerial switch-up might impact the Bromley-based side are **Brighton**.

The Seagulls are seventh and just a point behind London City following their victory over the Lionesses.

However, that was followed by a 3-0 loss to Chelsea. One



Bunny Shaw after netting Manchester City's second in the win over Leicester City

positive, though, was goalkeeper Sophie Baggaley's six saves and she is set to challenge Chiamaka Nnadozie once the starting keeper returns from concussion protocol.

Aston Villa will hope to pounce on Brighton's defensive frailties when they face off at Villa Park on January 11 in their first WSL match of 2026.

Villa are on 13 points, just one below the Seagulls, so it is a mouth-watering match-up to kick off the New Year.

It's been a busy month for Natalia Arroyo's team, with mixed results across three matches.

Rachel Daly's goal after just 27 seconds was the standout moment of a 3-0 win versus Liverpool, which also saw a second Daly and a strike by Kirsty Hanson, but this was sandwiched between setbacks against Tottenham (2-1) and Manchester City (6-1).

Leicester City also

suffered defeat at the hands of the league leaders, 3-0 at home.

Yet the Foxes had reason to celebrate heading into the holidays - their 1-0 win over London City ended an eight-match winless run and pushed them six points away from danger.

Everton are also in a better position than they were at the start of December, sitting five points above the relegation play-off zone as opposed to three. The Toffees' shock win over Chelsea was the highlight of their season so far, but a 3-1 blow against Arsenal the following week meant they have not won a single point at home this season.

Brian Sorensen's side face another tough test against top-of-the-table Manchester City in their first match of 2026, with **West Ham United** within touching distance three points behind.

The Hammers had a diffi-

cult December, and sacked head coach Rehanne Skinner just before Christmas, turning to Rita Guarino as new boss. The former striker led Juventus to four successive Serie A titles and was most recently in charge of Inter Milan.

A 2-1 loss against Manchester United was followed by a missed opportunity against strugglers Liverpool.

Though the Reds were down to 10 players for most of the match after Gemma Bonner was sent off in the 19th minute, West Ham failed to capitalise despite goals from Riko Ueki and Ffion Morgan.

Beata Olsson's last-minute goal rescued a 2-2 draw for **Liverpool**, who are just two points below the East London club. It was the sole positive in a less than festive month for the bottom-placed team, which saw two losses and five goals conceded.



Brighton's Kiko Seike, right, with Maisie Symonds after scoring against London City

SALLY RAWLINS/WSL FOOTBALL VIA GETTY IMAGES



Leicester's Shannon O'Brien and Julie Thibaud celebrate after their win over London City Lionesses

PLUMB IMAGES/LEICESTER CITY FC VIA GETTY

NICK POTTS/PA WIRE

HOW THEY STAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Man City	11	10	0	1	32	10	30
Chelsea	11	7	3	1	19	6	24
Arsenal	11	6	4	1	23	10	22
Man Utd	11	6	3	2	24	13	21
Tottenham	11	6	2	3	16	16	20
London City	11	5	0	6	14	21	15
Brighton	11	4	2	5	14	13	14
Aston Villa	11	3	4	4	14	18	13
Leicester City	11	2	3	6	7	20	9
Everton	11	2	2	7	14	22	8
West Ham	11	1	2	8	9	24	5
Liverpool	11	0	3	8	8	21	3

Correct as of January 5, 2026