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JULY 2022

UEFA

LAUREN HEMP

ENGLAND

The Women's Euro is upon us and with it, a chance to observe an ever-increasing pool of extremely talented players in a highly competitive environment. Lauren Hemp, of Manchester City and England, is definitely among them. The 21-year-old winger will be looking to add another successful national team campaign to her already impressive tally of achievements.

So, who is she and what makes her so special in the first place? This tactical analysis will give you a scout report on Hemp and visualise her player profile based on the tactics of her team and the analysis of her tool kit. Without further ado, let's discover something about Hemp the person and then find out more about Hemp the player.

BACKGROUND

From playing football in the household garden with her sister Amy to being touted as one of the brightest young players on the planet, Lauren Hemp's rise to stardom has been as scintillating as it has been impressive. Now aged 21, the heroine of North Walsham is looking to continue her domination of world football and solidify a place among the very best the sport has to offer — and so far, that journey has been going exceptionally well.

Hemp has already clinched three PFA Young Player of the Year awards, the final one coming in 2021, got the England Young Player of the Year award in 2017 and was also named a SportsAid 'One To Watch'. Now, in addition to being one of the best at what she does, the 21-year-old is also a regular at a rampant Manchester City side and a member of the Lionesses' team, having earned her first call-up to England's senior squad for the 2020 SheBelieves Cup tournament in America, quickly followed by a role in Team GB's appearance at the Tokyo Olympics.

The young star is powerful, rapid, creative and decisive in almost all aspects of the beautiful game so her rise from North Walsham and Bristol to Manchester City and England has been exciting and more importantly, well-deserved.

DATA ANALYSIS

We'll start our tactical analysis by dissecting Hemp's data profile. Here, we'll discuss her main attacking, defending and passing characteristics and see how she's performed in the 2021/22 domestic season. Let's see what she excels at in the following graph.
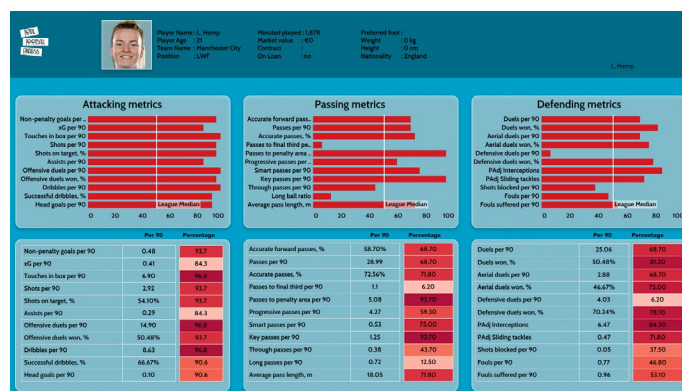
As you can see from her data profile, there isn't much Hemp isn't good at. When it comes to pure attacking output, she almost has no equal as most of the metrics put her in at least the 90th percentile. The young winger dwarfs categories like non-penalty goals per 90, touches in the box per 90, shots, duels, dribbles — the whole nine yards. It doesn't take an expert to recognise the immense talent Hemp has.

Even more importantly, as prolific and decisive as she is, the Englishwoman's work rate off the ball is equally impressive. As we'll see further down the line of this tactical analysis, she's a part of a very aggressive and hard-working Manchester City team and a lot of it is reflected in the defensive metrics as well. She engages — and wins — a lot of duels, intercepts passes and is formidable in the air. Even when defending, Hemp is a complete player in her own right.

The only category she doesn't completely dominate is passing. Hemp isn't a build-up machine but due to the tactics and the nature of her team(s), she still gets into contact with the ball quite often. However, she loves to progress more via running as opposed to passing. However, even in the 'lacking' category, the 21-year-old is still more than just decent.

Now, without further ado, let's jump straight into her most prominent traits.

ATTACKING PHASE

Being a prolific winger with both an eye for goal and a creative tool kit, it doesn't surprise that Hemp is an incredible asset in the attacking phase of the game. The 21-year-old will largely be deployed on the left side of Manchester City's offensive structure, looking to both create and exploit space in the final third of the pitch. This is important to understand because Hemp isn't a build-up tool.

Yes, she will drop deeper when necessary and coordinate her movement depending on the wide defender's positioning but she isn't the type of player to be heavily involved in the first phase nor is she a progressive passer either. Rather, her greatest tool lies in progressive running. This is a trait that aids the first phase when needed, sure, but neither England nor Manchester City use it as such. Instead, we will see Hemp high and wide, ready to receive possession hugging the touchline and then starting one of her mazy, marauding runs.

Our first example shows an impressive sequence that starts just at the entrance to the final third and ends in the opposition's box.
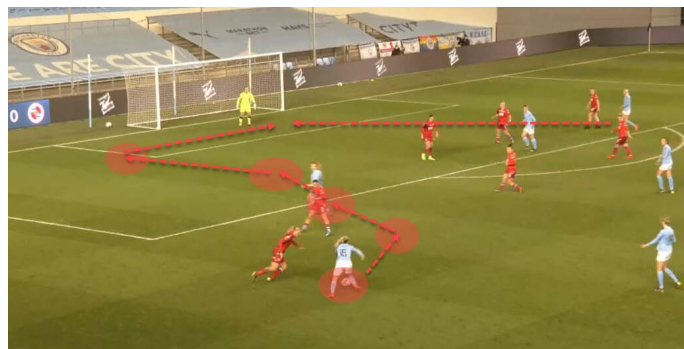
The run itself is simply mesmerising but what's even more important to note here is that it's also quite common for Hemp. She's got incredible running power, something akin to Barcelona's Frenkie de Jong or even Kevin De Bruyne, both of whom are nigh unstoppable when cutting through defensive blocks in a straight line. Hemp averaged 4.49 progressive runs per 90 in 2021/22 across all competitions, followed by 8.74 dribbles per 90 with a 70.2% success rate.

Just to put that into context, she ranked first in both progressive runs and 1v1 and dribbling in the 2021/22 WSL campaign, registering 104 and 180 in total respectively. Remarkably, the second-best player could manage only 58 in the carries department, showing how ridiculously proficient Hemp is at it. Let's look at more examples that showcase her offensive repertoire.

Apart from running power, she is an excellent crosser of the ball, courtesy of being a left-footed winger deployed on the left side of the pitch. As such, the England international benefits from the wide winger role that instructs her to provide and hold width while also being a constant threat through elite deliveries into the box; this is also where we have to talk about movement and positional awareness.
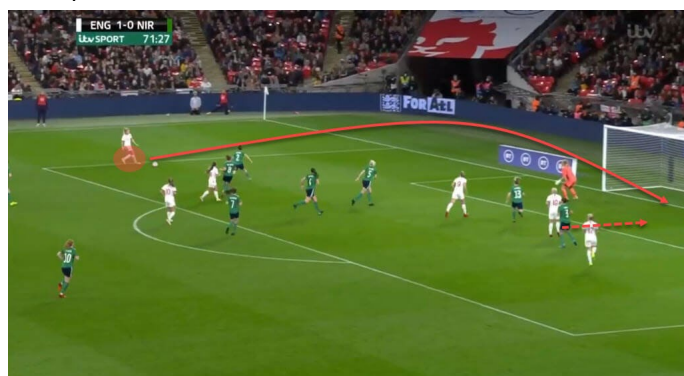
In the example here, Hemp is already isolated on the left flank and is afforded far too much time on the ball. This is a rookie mistake by the opposition, yes, but also a part of both England's and Manchester City's tactics. Overloading one side just to isolate and release Hemp on the other is a recipe for success, simply due to her effective delivery kit.

The 21-year-old averaged 6.8 crosses per 90 with a 35.8% success rate and 1.89 shot assists in 2021/22 across all competitions, good enough for 0.41 assists per 90 from 0.31 xA per 90 and a total of 17 assists across 3771 minutes of game time. Note, of course, that not all of those assists come from crosses but being ranked first in crosses in the 21/22 WSL campaign with 134, it's fair to say they make a big part of her offensive kit.

However, it's not just the delivery that's important here. Hemp moves well and is adept at recognising when and where to run and also how and when to release passes. Our next sequence will tell us more about that.


Here, Hemp needs to create the separation by first moving backwards a few steps, opening a channel for her teammate to use, and only then receiving the ball and starting to run with it. Once that's been accomplished, she glides past her marker almost effortlessly — something you'll see more often than not — and deploys a cutback which turns into an assist.

With her 26 total key passes and 7.05 expected assists (xA), she ranked second and first respectfully in the 21/22 WSL season. Hemp is creative as they come but it's the movement,

intelligence and ball-striking that makes her a direct threat to the opposition's goal too. With 16 goal contributions, she ranks fourth in the aforementioned WSL season, proving once more how crucial and lethal she is.

Our final example showcasing her creativity and progressive running power depicts all of these aspects in one single sequence. Here, Hemp receives the ball between the lines and in a deeper position on the pitch. Note that she's still in the opposition's half but has a deeper starting position than what we've seen so far.
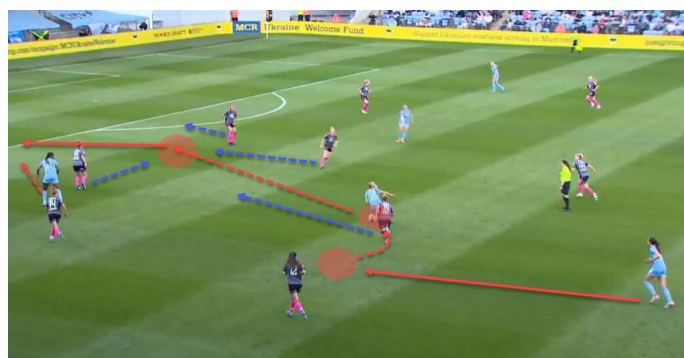
Upon receiving, the young talent breezes past her marker and starts a powerful run towards the opposition's penalty area. The impressive thing here is the timing of her release of the ball. Hemp waits until multiple markers have collapsed onto her position, creating space elsewhere that can be exploited with a single pass — and exploit it she does, shortly after. This sequence alone shows her positional awareness, running and dribbling power, passing and timing of the release. Incredible passage of play by the 21-year-old.

Now, let's turn to goal-scoring, in particular, for a moment. The young winger has notched 10 goals in the WSL and 27 across 3771 minutes in all competitions in 2021/22. Good enough for 0.64 goals per 90 from 0.49 expected goals per 90. This indicates a slight overperformance but nothing that would suggest an unstable return in the long-run — yet. When it comes to her positioning and shooting in the box, again, this comes down to tactics and her movement.
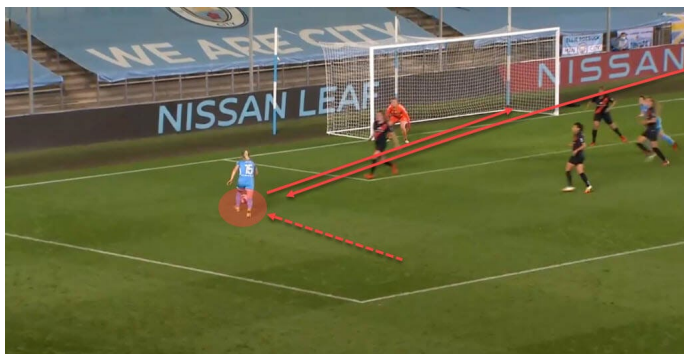
Hemp loves to attack the box, as indicated by her 7.52 touches in the penalty area per 90 across all competitions and 144 in total in WSL, good enough to be ranked second in the league for pure quantitative output. However, it's her positional awareness and the team's efforts to enable her to exploit good shooting positions in the first place.

In our latest example, Hemp is already isolated and afforded far more time and space than she should've been considering the high-quality chance at goal. That's largely the case with her efforts at goal. She's a prolific goal-scorer but only because she's that intelligent too. Her movement aids her creativity but also ensures she can be a direct goal threat as well. A quick glance at her last 75 shots for the entirety of the 2021/22 campaign across all competitions can tell us more.

The map suggests most of her goals come from high-quality chances, meaning her movement can resemble that of a poacher. Many of Hemp's goals come from close-range shots just in front of the goalkeeper and rarely originate from outside

the area. Long-range efforts are something she should be working on but the fact the 21-year-old doesn't even take that many in the first place suggests she's aware of this flaw in her player profile.

TRANSITIONS

Being a rapid winger with technique and lethality means Hemp is also highly effective in transitions. Generally, Manchester City will dominate their opposition but having strong outlets is key to any elite team's success. This makes the 21-year-old forward an even bigger piece of the jigsaw. Hemp is fast on her feet and can cover large distances while maintaining or even increasing her overall pace. In a footrace, she's often the likely winner.

So how does this transition to her team's counter-attacking threat? As noted before in this tactical analysis, Hemp is generally positioned high and wide in the attacking phase and the same can be said when the squad is trying to transition from the deep. Her pace and positioning allow her to be an outlet down the flanks as the winger will relentlessly attack space.

In this example, we can see her team transitioning down the middle of the pitch and Hemp is on the left side, making a darting run from the deep. Even though she was a part of the defensive structure just mere moments ago, the 21-year-old is now providing an outlet on the wings. Her pace, type of movement and lethal tool kit make her a tremendous presence in this phase of the game.

Hemp receives the ball from her teammate and quickly delivers a good return pass into the box. In a matter of seconds, her team went from defending deep to bombarding the opposition's penalty area with crosses, courtesy of their young Englishwoman. We shouldn't forget Hemp's aggressive and powerful ball-carrying though, as this is extremely useful in transitional sequences.

Having the ability to conquer vast territory with the ball at her feet, Hemp is adept at single-handedly progressing the ball from her half to the danger zones on the other side of the pitch. You can see a similar sequence in the following example.
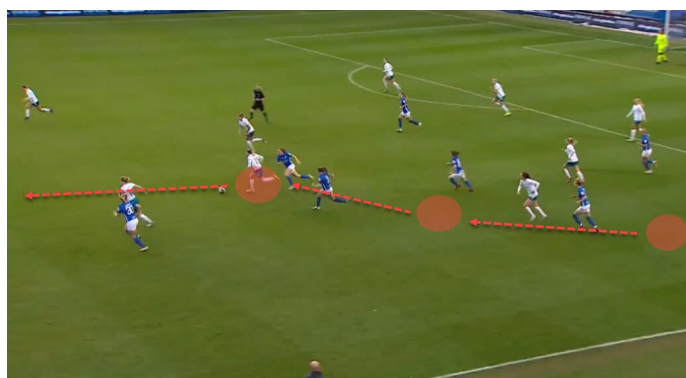
It's very difficult to capture such moments of magic in a single image but Hemp's mazy runs are indeed mesmerising to watch. In this example, she effectively dances around four opposition players before breaking into open space towards the other team's half. This not only conquers massive territory but also nullifies any sort of pressing structure you throw at Manchester City or England. In the modern day of high-pressing systems, this type of press resistance and progression is a godsend.

Before we wrap this section of our scout report up, we have to talk about Hemp's defensive transitions. Granted, this only boils down to her work rate, stamina and pace. It's quite impressive to see a prolific forward put as much effort into continuously running, tracking back and covering for teammates and Hemp does all of it admirably.

In the following example against Barcelona, we can see the 21-year-old track all the way back from the opposition's penalty area to Manchester City's half of the pitch.
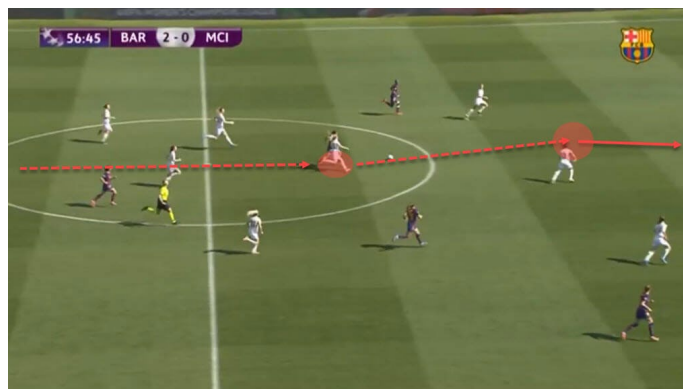
Once she successfully recovers the ball, Hemp proceeds to send it back to the goalkeeper, resetting her team's attack and extinguishing the other team's potentially dangerous sequence. All in a day's work for the young prodigy.

DEFENSIVE PHASE

Hemp is a clear asset in the attacking phase of the game but that doesn't mean she's not effective off the ball too. However, context is crucial once more. In order to fully understand how she defends, we have to understand how Manchester City defend as a team. In the 2021/22 WSL campaign, the Citizens were the team who pressed the most, registering 7.27 PPDA (passes allowed per defensive action), the lowest figure in the league. Note that the lower the PPDA number, the more aggressive the team presses in general.

This, of course, is not the only metric that depicts aggressiveness off the ball but considering Man City's challenge intensity for the same season stands at an impressive 7 (As per Wyscout, quantifying how many defensive actions - defensive duels, loose ball duels, interceptions, tackles - a team is doing per minute of opponent ball possession), good enough for third-best in the WSL, we can conclude they are a high-pressing, aggressive squad; Hemp plays a big

part in that as their press is often instigated by the forwards.

Just like the whole team as a collective, the 21-year-old plays with a bite. She's a relentless runner, both in tracking back and pressing. The following graph depicts her defensive duels in a select few games where the sample was big enough to analyse.
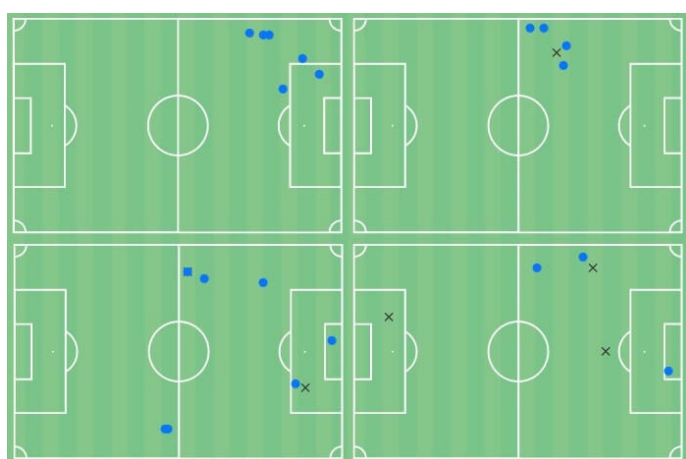
You'll immediately note one thing: most of her defensive duels come very high on the pitch, even stretching to the opposition's penalty area. Of course, this is all connected with how Manchester City set up their defensive block but Hemp is often the one chasing the ball to the ends of the Earth.

The numbers confirm this thesis as well. In the 2021/22 campaign and across all competitions, the young winger has registered 4.53 defensive duels per 90 with a 70% success rate, 3.44 loose ball duels (34% won) and 4.37 recoveries per 90 with a whopping 77.6% in the opposition half of the pitch. These are impressive numbers that go in line with the team's overall dynamic. She's rapid, aggressive and relentless, which is something you can easily say about Manchester City as a team too.

Let's look at some examples next. In the following one, you can see Hemp chasing the ball from Manchester City's standard block.
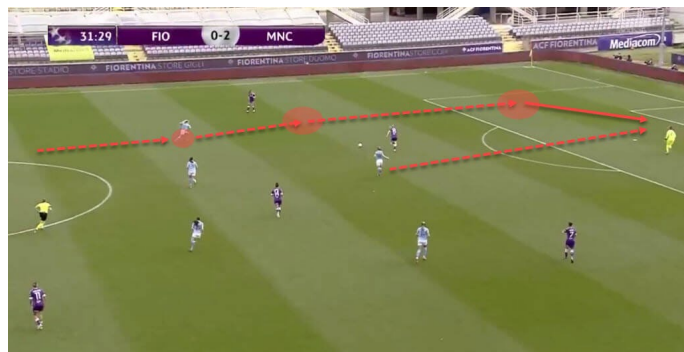
Note how she reads the opposition play well and knows she can get to the ball, intercept it and then turn defence into attack in a blink of an eye. Once more, we see her work rate, willingness to press and then, once she recovers possession, ball-carrying and decisiveness. Moments later, the opposition players are taking the ball out of their net and Hemp registers another assist for her ever-increasing tally.

However, Hemp actively hunts for the ball and related to this, one of her great characteristics is that she won't give up. Perhaps it's her age that accounts for the eagerness the young winger displays in her profile but whatever it is, it's playing a crucial part in her teams' tactics. The sheer determination has been the cause for many interceptions, recoveries and even chances created. Even more importantly, she does it cleanly most of the time.

For someone who is so aggressive in her approach, Hemp makes only 0.62 fouls per 90 and has also registered just 0.02 yellow cards per 90. This makes for only a single yellow card across 3771 minutes of play in 2021/22. Incredibly impressive. Let's see some more of her defensive work in action, though.
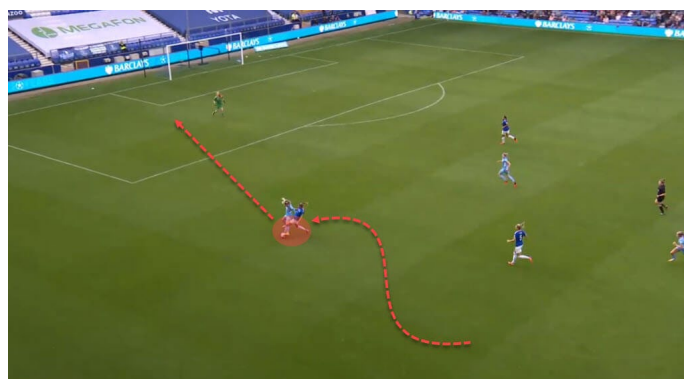
The sequence you can see here comes very late in the game, but Hemp doesn't care. She's still pressing like the game had just started and ends up recovering the ball very high up the pitch. The attack may not amount to anything in the end but the example still shows us some of the key elements in her player profile. Hemp works very hard for the team and tries and tries again until she succeeds.

This says a lot about her mentality, which is a crucial aspect of any young player's development. Being able to push through a brick wall and jump through numerous hoops to get to the goal is priceless. Here's another example depicting a very similar thing, albeit in a slightly different context.

This time, Hemp was chasing the ball deep into enemy territory. However, the pass was slightly overhit and the 21-year-old couldn't get there in time. At first, that is. But her 'never quit' attitude compels her to keep pushing, fighting and biting for the ball. Eventually, she wins the duel, gets the ball and then deploys a cutback into the box for her teammate.

Whether the attack ends in a goal or not is not as important here anymore. What matters is her approach to any given action. There is no lost cause as far as Hemp is concerned; she will keep fighting until there's nothing left to fight for. For a forward of her stature, this is a priceless trait to have.

Long may it continue.

PHYSICAL PROFILE

In this part of our tactical analysis of Lauren Hemp, we'll analyse her physical profile. This includes her height, build, mobility, power, stamina, acceleration and pace in different scenarios and phases of play. Some of these aspects have already been touched upon earlier in the scout report but we'll discuss them in a bit more detail here once more.

Hemp is 5ft 5" (164cm) tall and weighs around 54 kg (119 lbs), which makes for almost an ideal frame for a dynamic winger. Even though she isn't big, Hemp can use her frame well to shield and control the ball and even brush off defenders. One of the big aspects of a good forward is how resistant they are to being dominated by their markers. Despite her rather diminutive physical appearance, the 21-year-old is more than capable of winning challenges, as confirmed by her 70% win rate in defensive duels for the 2021/22 season.

One of the reasons for her dribbling and progressive running success, however, is Hemp's low centre of gravity. She always seems in perfect balance when dancing around her markers and as a result of that aforementioned centre of gravity, she can keep her balance while squeezing through tight defensive blocks. The youngster is also quite agile and mobile, meaning she can twist and turn quickly and effectively in multiple directions at impressive speeds.

As far as power is concerned, she isn't physically imposing but as mentioned earlier in this section of our scout report, she can more than hold her own against defenders who are potentially bigger than her. Being able to run body-to-body is a crucial aspect of a forward who attacks space and is often chased down by defenders. Her acceleration and pure pace are also impressive.

Even more so considering she runs in small but quick strides, which, for a winger, can be a disadvantage. Players who run in big strides are extremely difficult to stop once they get going. However, in true Lionel Messi style, Hemp makes up for her diminutive physique with agility, mobility and quickness, both of thought and movement.

This becomes even more impressive when the 21-year-old is in action in tight spaces. She never seems to run out of space to manoeuvre and somehow gets through even the tightest of cracks in defensive structures. Finally, her stamina is impressive as well. Hemp can be seen pressing and recovering the ball high up the pitch even in the dying minutes of the game, as already discussed in the defensive phase of our tactical analysis.

She may not be a physical specimen but is still quick, agile, hardworking, aggressive and tough — an excellent set of attributes for a rising star in world football.

CONCLUSION

At 21 years of age, Lauren Hemp has her entire career ahead of her but if these early signs are anything to go by, she'll become one of the best players on the planet sooner rather than later. With a very intriguing and complete skill set, the English star in making is bound to take the world of football by storm, starting with the upcoming Euro tournament.

Don't blink as you might miss her wreaking havoc in an England shirt. Again.

AUSTRIA:

GROUP A

CHRIS WINTER // @ChrisW_D

After surprising everyone in what was their first-ever major international tournament at Euro 2017. Semi-finalists Austria will be coming to England as a team no one will enjoy facing.

As we approach the pre-tournament-friendly matches, the Austrians will be in a jovial, confident mood. They have won their last five fixtures, scoring 28 goals and conceding just three in the process. Although some of those matches will be judged to have been played against weaker opposition, Head Coach Irene Fuhrmann will surely feel this is a good platform to continue from.

Tactically, Fuhrmann is adaptable and flexible with her approach. Over the last calendar year, she has favoured an expansive 4-3-3 but has shown previously that she is not afraid of change and has opted for 4-1-4-1, 3-5-2 and 5-3-2 formations during her tenure.

This tactical analysis will provide an in-depth look at Austria's tactics and how they plan to repeat their performance from 2017. We will provide data analysis on their attacking threat, and their defensive strategy, along with reviewing which players are likely to influence their tournament.

PREDICTED STARTING XI

Austria favour a 4-3-3 set-up during their matches. This setup allows Irene Fuhrmann the flexibility to switch between maintaining a solid defensive shape and a fluid attacking shape.

Above is our prediction for the starting XI that Irene Fuhrmann will go into this tournament with. There will be no surprise in goal as Manuela Zinsberger has just finished one of the best seasons of her career with Arsenal. She has always been a good shot-stopper and after watching her games for Austria in the qualifying stages, she is getting better with the ball at her feet.

The full-back positions pick themselves, as Verena Hanshaw and Laura Wienrother are ideal for how Austria utilise these positions within their approach. Hanshaw is good at getting forward and providing width down the left-hand side and Wienrother offers good versatility.

She will sit inside and join the centre backs making a back three as Austria switches shape during the attacking phase. She will provide a good defensive balance to the opposite full-back who will look to support the attack more.

In midfield, Austria have several options to choose from and Irene Fuhrmann will likely choose the players that offer the most balance specific to the team they are playing against at that point. Three players are guaranteed to start — Sarah Puntigams, Barbara Dunst and Sarah Zadrazil. Puntigams' role is important as she provides the link between the defence and attack, while her positioning is pivotal to how the team transitions between both phases of play. Dunst's movement in the attacking third is crucial, as she moves centrally to support the striker and provides a goal threat. Finally, Sarah Zadrazil has good defensive and attacking instincts along with good energy as she supports the play from box to box.

Although we have opted for Marie Hobinger and Katharina Naschenweng, they are the players most likely to change depending on how Irene Fuhrmann wants the team to impose themselves on the opposition in the attacking third. Julia Hickelsberger and Laura Feiersinger could feature in the starting XI.

Austria have a good age range within their possible squad selection for this championship. The chart below shows they have a good number of players in their prime years, along with a nice blend of experience and youth.

Austria Squad age profile

ATTACKING PHASE

Austria - In possession - Attacking
Women's Euro 2022
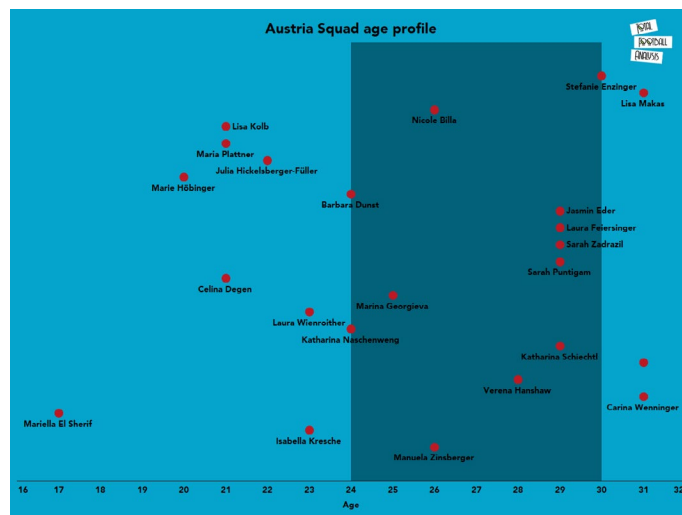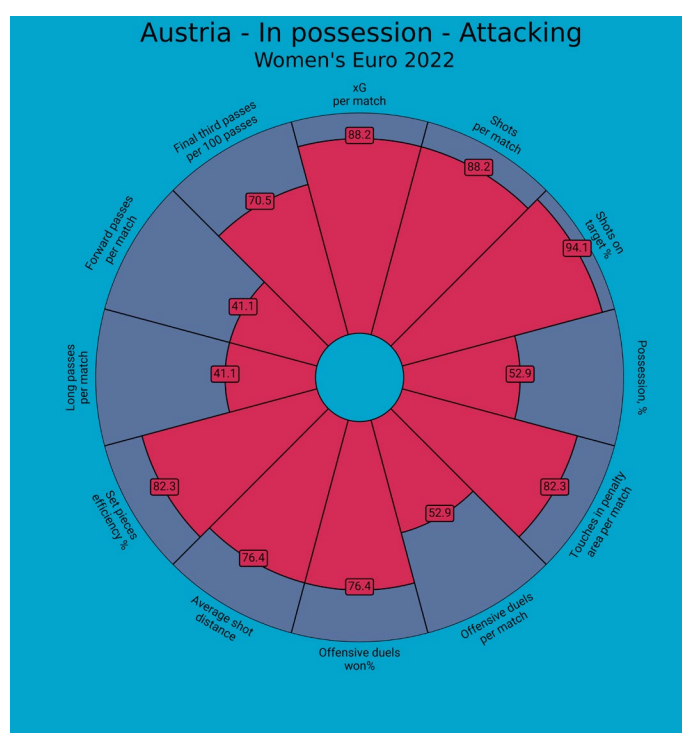
Under Irene Fuhrmann, Austria have developed a vertical-based possession game. They enjoy playing out from the back and look to play progressively through each third of the pitch.

The metrics tell us they keep possession at a relatively average amount but they impressively rank quite high for passes made into the final third. As they play just as many long passes as they do short passes, this would suggest their possession is purposeful and not retentive.

When they build up from the goalkeeper, the goalkeeper will preferably look to play through the centre-backs. The shape they build up with from the defensive third will change depending on the formation of their opponents. The image below shows how Irene Fuhrmann wants Austria to play when they are playing out through defence against a 4-3-3 or an equivalent formation with a lone centre forward. You can see how the fullbacks are positioned higher than their defensive line. The defensive midfielder will drop into the central space in front of the centre-backs to provide an option to progress the play centrally and then the full-backs will continue to push higher and support the attacking third.
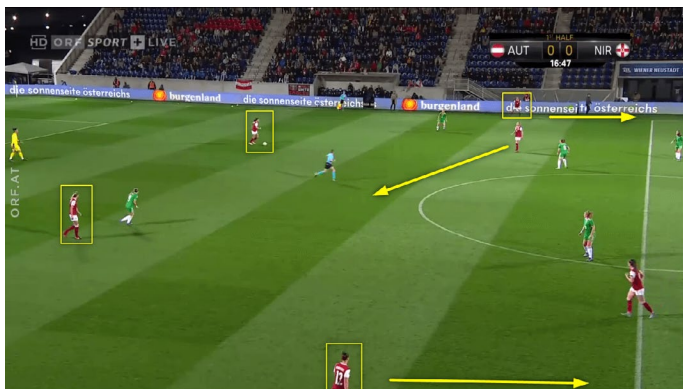
Compare this to the build-up structure they use when playing against a team that plays with two centre forwards. The difference is that they only instruct one full-back to push further forward when playing this way. In this instance, the right full-back has come inside to sit narrow, and the central defenders have moved across and have formed a back three from which to build up. This maintains they keep a numerical advantage and allows them good progression opportunities.
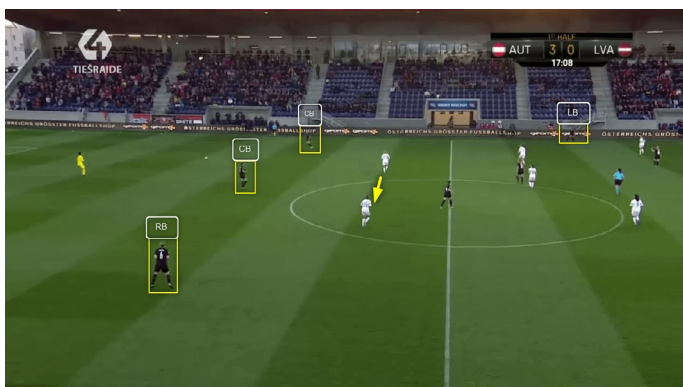
Once the play progresses and the teams enter the creative stage of play, their attacking shape will

transition between a 3-1-6 and a 3-2-5. Although a 3-2-5 is preferred as it will give them greater central control. This is where Irene Fuhrmann has shown flexibility with her approach and coaching methods. As Austria can and will switch between both attacking shapes in the same match, depending on the situation. Fuhrmann has made them unpredictable in that regard.
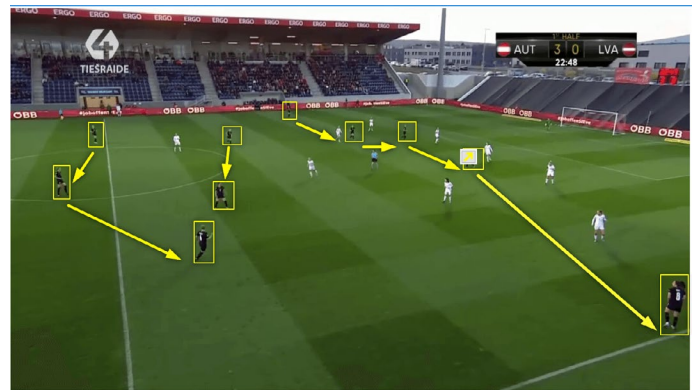
The below image shows a 3-1-6 shape but could still be considered a 3-2-5 approach, the difference being the centre midfielder is pushing further forward in this game. This shows Austria's flexibility not just within their shape but within their players. The players provide good movement which helps determine how they penetrate the opposition defence. This image shows the midfielder joining the attacking line and the image above shows the midfielder holding her position to create a double pivot.

From a positional perspective, you can see how Austria want to attack. Every zone has a player occupying it when they approach the attacking third. This ensures the team has an attacking threat right across the pitch as they progress forward and overload the opposition's penalty area. Getting players into the penalty area and its surrounding area is vital for Austria's pass-

and-move approach, and something the 3-2-5 attacking shape encourages.

If Austria are attacking in their desired shape, they will have four players in both half-spaces and the central corridor. The players occupying the wide channels are the players that enable Austria to stretch the opposition and create space to exploit. These players are fundamental to the system, as Austria enjoys overloading the wide areas.
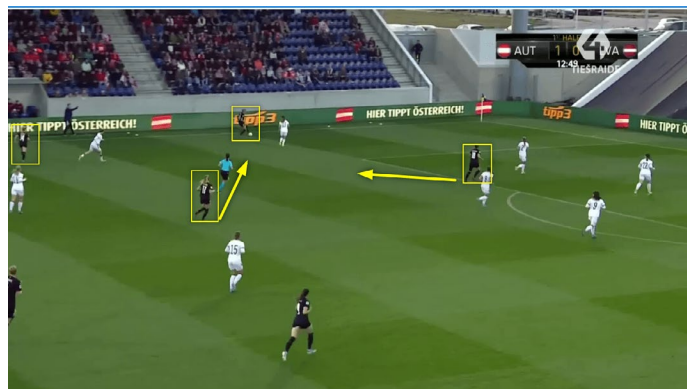
DEFENSIVE PHASE
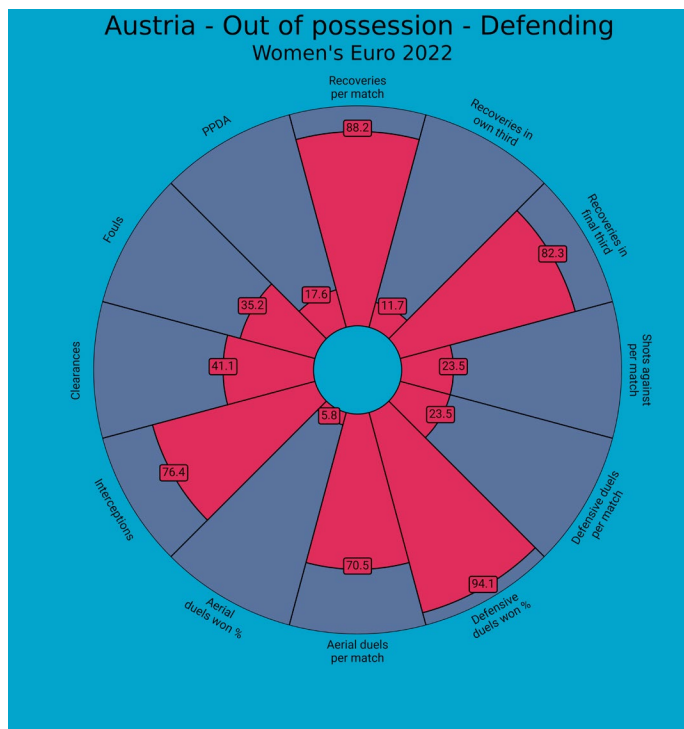
Defensively, Austria sits in a strong 4-1-4-1 shape. Fuhrmann has built a side that defends with intensity, and who works hard individually and collectively as a team. Overall, they have a very good work ethic.

Out of possession, they press individually and positionally as the rest of the players hold their shape. When each player presses against the ball, they are not aggressive in their pursuit of the ball. They aim to block the space and the passing lanes off, to stop the opposition from progressing the play and therefore making them difficult to play through. This principle applies right through each third of the pitch.

When compared to the other national teams in the qualifying stages Austria's defensive work proved effective.

When they are defending their defensive third and penalty area, the defensive shape moves into a 4-5-1 as the midfield look to close any gaps between the lines.
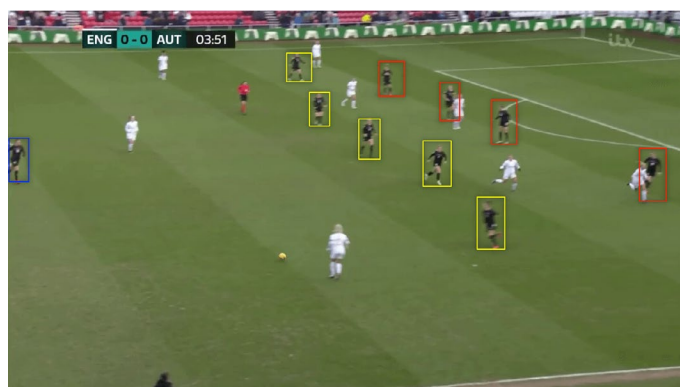
As they hold their shape higher on the pitch, they still press individually but the team sits narrower as they want to compress the space and push the opposition down one side. This happens once the opposition progresses their play through to the middle third of the pitch.
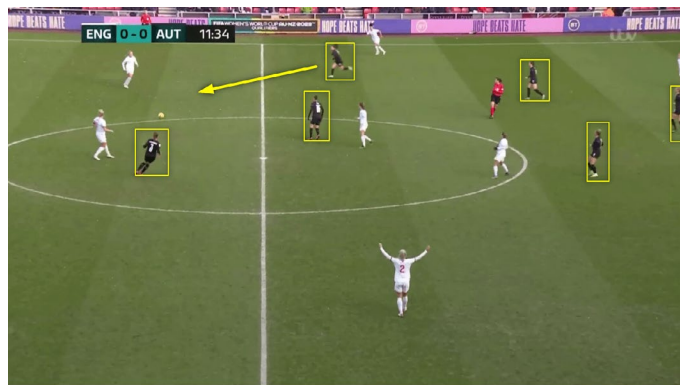
Although Austria don't counter press the opposition, they still look to press the opposition high up the pitch. The pressing trigger is not set

to force the other team down a specific area such as the wings, rather their general plan is to force them backwards and away from their goal.
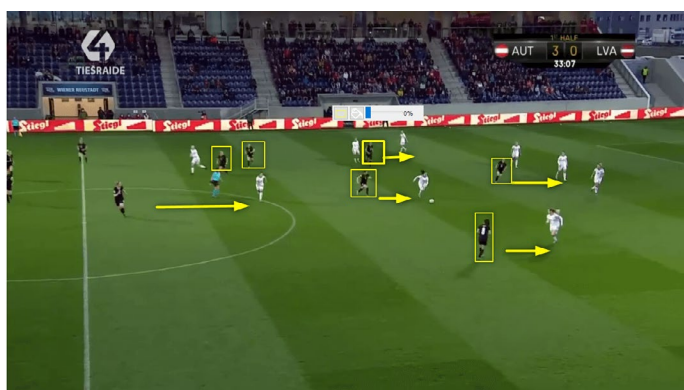
Irene Fuhrmann will adapt the team's defensive structure depending on the quality of the opposition. However, the same principles will always apply.

Their high number of interceptions shows the team's anticipation is good and averaging so many recoveries in the final third shows the opposition has difficulty playing through them without conceding possession, with Austria focusing a lot on winning the ball high. They don't make so many recoveries in their own third, again, as a result of the fact that they generally like to engage the opposition higher.

TRANSITION

Part of the strategy behind a 3-1-6 or a 3-2-5 attacking shape is to account for how a team performs in transitional phases of play. The 3-1 and 3-2 structures prepare the team for defensive transition as it keeps the players involved behind the ball. The six or five other outfield players are responsible for the transition from defence to attack.

This suits Austria. Although they do not necessarily always look to win the ball back quickly during the defensive phase, when they do, they look to transition to attack with quick and vertical play.

In this image, they intercept the play in midfield as Latvia struggle to play through them. Four players immediately start to attack and they make straight for the space down the right flank leading to the play getting cleared from a cross.
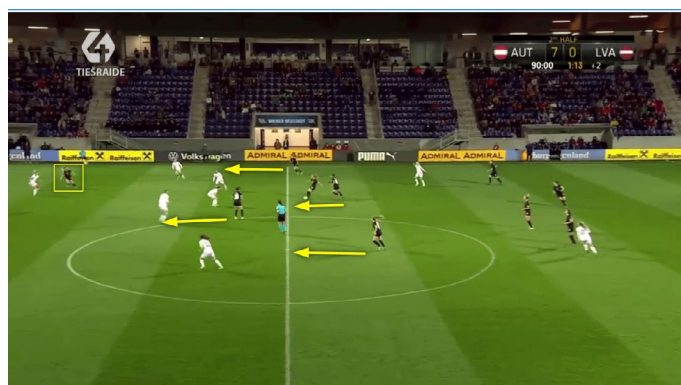
The cross gets cleared straight back to Austria, who are then presented with the scenario below. The image shows how Austria now has four players ahead of the ball carrier with two more about to join them. Within seven seconds, Austria intercepted the play in their half, had one attack cleared and are now attacking Latvia's penalty area with seven players — including the person in possession.
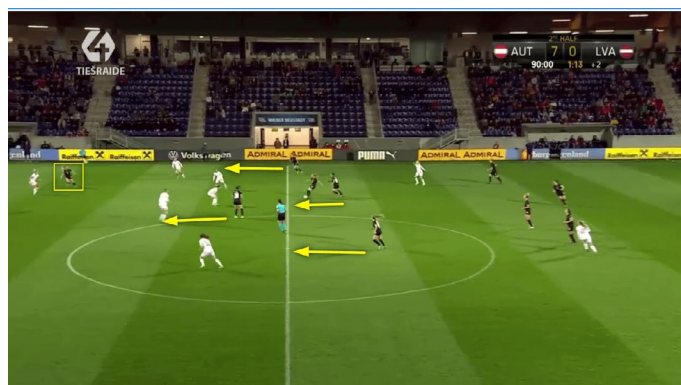
Here, you can see the 3-1 defensive structure as Austria lose possession and transition from attack to defence. Naturally, you see the team shift over to the ball side and attempt to close down the ball carrier. What's key in this transition is the player sitting in front of the three defenders and the movement she makes. The player who performs this role during this set-up does not look to close down the woman in possession; she moves across and blocks the space in front of the ball carrier to stop her from being able to progress the ball directly. This tends to slow down the opposition's counterattack.
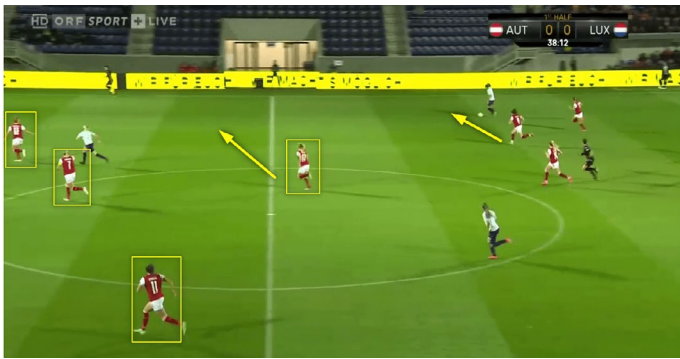
Sometimes when Austria attacks in a certain pattern, it can lead to them being vulnerable during their defensive transition. This occurs when both fullbacks push higher up the pitch at the same time. You end up in a situation like the one in this image. Instead of having that 3-2 or 3-1 defensive structure, Austria have left themselves with only three players behind the ball — both central defenders and the holding midfielder sitting in front. You can see how Northern Ireland have developed a 3v2 counterattack and have lots of space to attack on the outside.
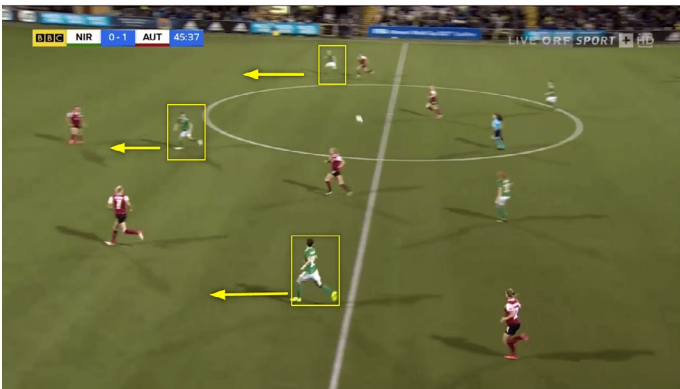
DEFENCE

As well as the experience each of Austria's defenders has between them, another important factor will be how well they play when they pass out from their defence.

They play with a lot of verticality in their passing as they want to play through each third of the pitch. To assist this, the central defenders are required to have good passing accuracy with the awareness to be able to play the ball forward. Marina Georgieva completes 18.2 forward

passes per 90 minutes with a success rate of 62.7%. Carina Wenninger completes 31.74 forward passes per 90 minutes with a success rate of 83.58% and Viktoria Schnaderbeck completes 18.47 forward passes per 90 and achieves a success rate of 70.4%. All three have shown the capability to match what the manager's tactical approach requires.

Irene Fuhrmann will likely opt for two out of these three as her centre-back pairing with Laura Wienrother tucking in from the right-hand side to allow that transition to a 3-1-6 shape.

MIDFIELD

The centre of midfield will be Sarah Punitigam, Sarah Zadrazil and one other. Puntigam and Zadrazil provide the perfect balance for the team to switch between the 4-1-4-1 defensive shape and the 3-1-6 attacking shape. As well as the other player playing alongside them, how well the midfield controls the space out of possession and how well they control the play whilst being in possession will play a key role in how well Austria plays at this tournament.

FORWARDS

Nicole Billa will play as the focal point for Austria's attacking play in the final third. The Hoffenheim centre-forward is effective at linking the play between her and midfield. This is essential for Austria's fluidity when they look to get players forward. As well as being prolific once she enters the penalty area, her ability to bring others and create chances for her teammates is impressive. She has a 65% pass completion rate as well as completing 2.42 passes into the penalty area per 90. Which is well above average.

Barbara Dunst is the one player that is almost certain to play in the wide areas and be looking

for support to Billa. Fuhrmann has used Dunst on both wings at different stages but it's when she plays on the right that Austria looks more balanced in the attacking third. During the qualifying stage, she scored four goals which put her as the second-highest goal scorer for Austria behind Billa.

opportunities she should. Given that Austria enjoys attacking down the channels and crossing the ball, she provides an attacking threat in the air as she performs above average in scoring headed goals.

BEST PERFORMER

	Per 90	Percentage
Non-penalty goals per 90	0.56	82.5
xG per 90	0.43	70
Touches in box per 90	3.78	70
Shots per 90	2.09	57.5
Shots on target, %	59.46%	82.5
Assists per 90	0.17	70
Offensive duels per 90	9.69	30
Offensive duels won, %	21.51%	10
Dribbles per 90	1.63	20
Successful dribbles, %	34.48%	10
Head goals per 90	0.06	62.5

	Per 90	Percentage
Accurate forward passes, %	48.81%	30.00
Passes per 90	24.01	65.00
Accurate passes, %	70.66%	60.00
Passes to final third per 90	2.09	37.50
Passes to penalty area per 90	2.42	85.00
Progressive passes per 90	2.48	42.50
Smart passes per 90	0.85	67.50
Key passes per 90	0.34	45.00
Through passes per 90	0.51	35.00
Long passes per 90	0.45	32.50
Average pass length, m	14.84	40.00

	Per 90	Percentage
Duels per 90	17.75	10.00
Duels won, %	30.16%	10.00
Aerial duels per 90	2.87	37.50
Aerial duels won, %	23.53%	22.50
Defensive duels per 90	2.71	7.50
Defensive duels won, %	70.83%	82.50
PAdj Interceptions	1.81	7.50
PAdj Sliding tackles	0.08	20.00
Shots blocked per 90	0	2.50
Fouls per 90	0.51	17.50
Fouls suffered per 90	0.23	7.50

Austria's player to watch and the most important player will be Nicole Billa. The 2021 Austrian Women's player of the year scored 22 goals and got 7 assists in all competitions this season. Billa is a striker who is excellent at anticipating the play, offers a lot of composure in the attacking third and plays a pivotal part in Austria's efficiency in the attacking third.

The Hoffenheim striker's attacking metrics, as indicated on the image breaking down her domestic performances for the last calendar year and comparing her statistics in each noted area with the league median, will bring even more confidence to her manager. Billa averaged 0.56 non-penalty goals per 90 minutes this season and boasts a great percentile ranking for shots on target per 90.

Overall, she brings a genuine quality and will be a nuisance to any opposition she plays against. Her expected goal per 90 is 0.43 which when compared to her goal record of 0.56 per 90 shows she is clinical and generally scores the

TOURNAMENT PREDICTION

The bar has been set high for them after they reached the semi-finals on their debut in 2017 but repeating the same success will prove very difficult.

Austria have been drawn into a very tough group. Being drawn against the favourites, England, and a team that many are predicting as dark horses, Norway, would suggest getting through the group stage will be a good achievement for this group of players. If they are successful in achieving that, they have been drawn on the same side of the draw as both Germany and Spain — another tall order.

However, being the underdogs could prove to be positive for Irene Fuhrmann and her team. They can look to impose their style of play and play with less pressure.

ENGLAND:

GROUP A

KARIM SHAHINE // @karimshahine

England will be hosting the long-awaited 2022 UEFA European Women's Championship this year, kicking off on July 6th at Old Trafford where the hosts will face Austria. Women's football has witnessed significant growth in support in recent years and is arguably shining the brightest it's ever shone. The Euros will be the icing on the cake of a breakthrough season.

The Lionesses arrive at the tournament with high hopes and aspirations. It will be Sarina Wiegman's first major tournament in charge, having become the first non-British permanent England manager when she took over the team last August. She has guided her team to nine wins, two draws and no losses in her short tenure (an 81.8% win rate), including a record-breaking 20-0 victory over Latvia. England currently top their 2023 Women's World Cup qualification group, winning all their 8 games and scoring a whopping 68 times without conceding a single goal. (That's 68-0!)

The Dutch manager steered the Netherlands to glory at the 2017 Euros while finishing as runners-up at the 2019 World Cup. She seems to be transferring her winning DNA to this England side, showcasing the progress being made as the Lionesses were crowned champions of the inaugural Arnold Clark Cup in February, playing the likes of Olympic Champions Canada and one of the world's most in-form teams, Spain.

In Group A they will face Austria, Norway and Northern Ireland, all of whom are ranked below England in the FIFA rankings. The Lionesses currently rank 8th worldwide and 6th in Europe behind Sweden, France, Germany, Netherlands, and Spain. Given their highly talented squad, boosted by the support from their home nation, the team is expected to top the group and go deep in the competition.

PREDICTED STARTING XI
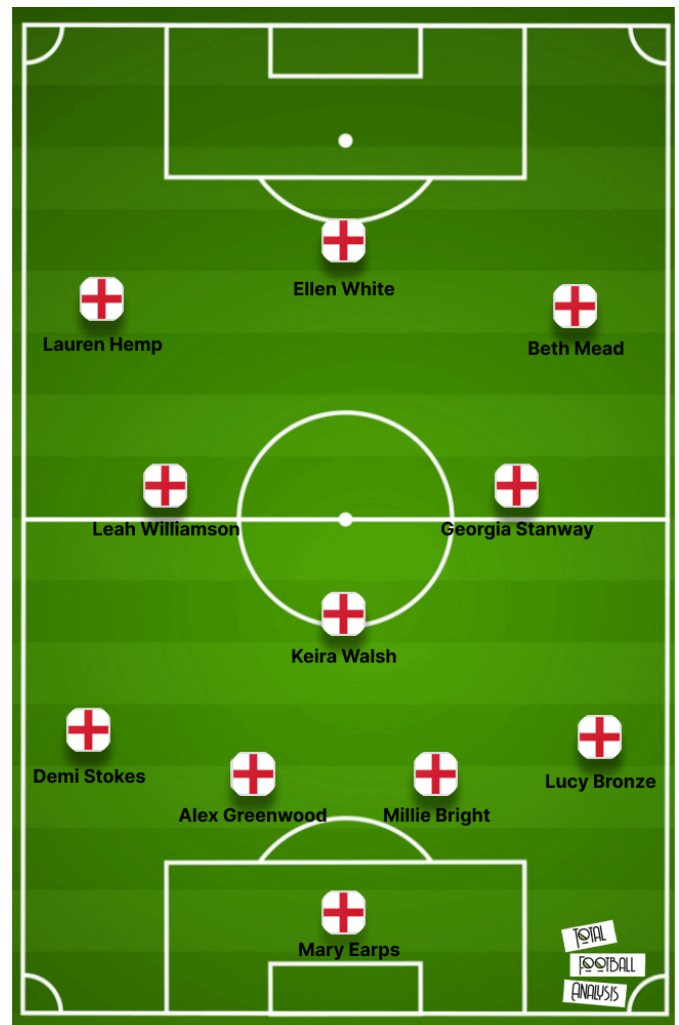
England announced their 23-player final squad on June 15th.

Former captain Steph Houghton is a big omission from the squad. Having not played a competitive game since January because of ankle and Achilles injuries, she could not prove her fitness to the manager. 'She's just not ready to compete' said Wiegman.

Jordan Nobbs is also a key absentee, with the Arsenal midfielder ruled out for the summer due to a knee injury.

The squad includes Fran Kirby, who has not played since February; she was an unused

substitute in Chelsea's Women's FA Cup triumph in May, though.

With Houghton absent from the final 23, Arsenal's Leah Williamson has been named as captain for the tournament.

Under Wiegman, England most prominently set up in a 4-3-3 formation. Mary Earps is expected to start in goal. At the back, the Manchester City trio of Lucy Bronze, Alex Greenwood and Demi Stokes will be joined by Chelsea's Millie Bright. In midfield, captain Leah Williamson, who can also play in central defence, will line up alongside Bayern Munich's Georgia Stanway and Keira Walsh in the holding position. Up front, record goal scorer Ellen White will be joined by two of the most exciting players on the planet right now, Beth Mead and Lauren Hemp.

England Squad age profile

This age chart includes all 28 players in England's initial provisional squad. The graphic is separated into youth (aged 24 and under), peak (24 to 30) and experienced (30 and over).

As can be seen, the majority of England's team are in their peak years. This is especially key at the back, with Bronze, Bright, Greenwood and Stokes all aged between 28 and 30, racking up 261 caps between them. Their experience and know-how will surely give the team a platform to express themselves and play with confidence — as England generally control possession and build up from the back.

ATTACKING PHASE

England - In possession - Attacking
Women's Euro 2022
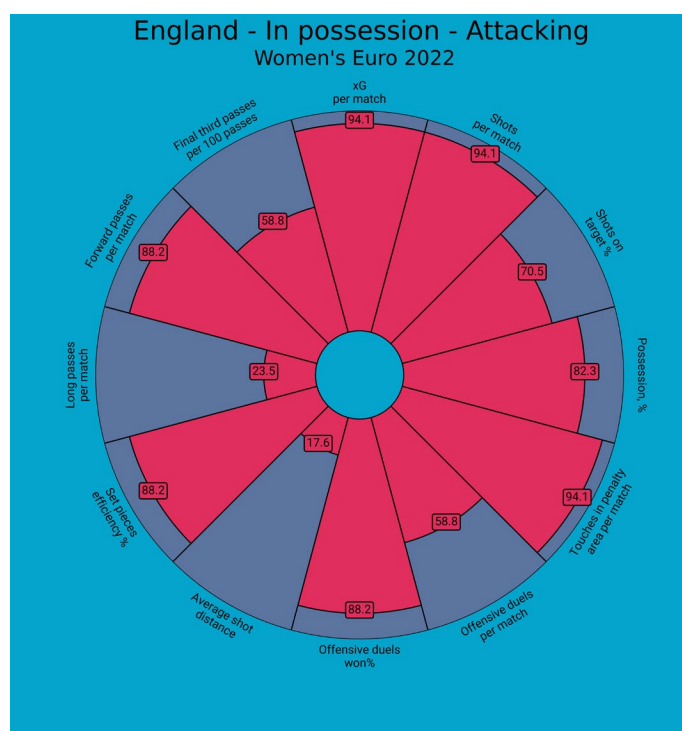
At first glance, what can be deduced from the above graphic is that England are a very attacking outfit. They are in the 94th percentile for xG per match, shots per match and touches in the opposition box. Also, England tend to dominate possession.

Since Wiegman's arrival, she has focused on introducing key tactical concepts that have made their play more streamlined and productive. This has been helped by the number of players available to her. She has awarded her players' flexibility on and off the ball, enabling them to make use of the spaces more efficiently. England have been able to keep the ball in the opposition half much more, building momentum and leading to waves and waves of attacks.

In the below image, England are camped in Northern Ireland's half during the World Cup qualifier back in April. The ball worked its way from the left flank, as can be with the group of players on that side of the pitch, and is now at the feet of Williamson. The skipper, playing at centre-back, has space to drive forward with

the ball as the Northern Ireland midfielders had been dragged to the left.

Williamson's natural vision and quality on the ball allow her to spot the run of Hemp in behind the defenders and slip through a delightful ball to set up Hemp as she rounds the 'keeper and scores. Hemp's positioning is interesting here; she drifts into a narrow position and cuts inside from the right channel. This demonstrates the flexibility of the England side to switch wings — as Hemp naturally plays on the left — and also to play with a narrow front three which gives the full-backs license to push on. One of Wiegman's tweaks has been to get the wide attackers into more central positions to operate in the middle and half-spaces as they are extremely dangerous in and around the box.

England tend to use the wings as much as possible; their main target is to get the ball to the feet of the electric Hemp and Mead on the flanks. The Lionesses make good use of the wide channels, with the full-backs getting high up the pitch in support. This creates numerical overloads on the wings.

When England face an opponent that successfully closes down the wingers, the ball-sided midfielder will create a triangle with the winger and full-back, sometimes making runs in behind to either drag an opposition player and free up the winger or receive the ball herself.
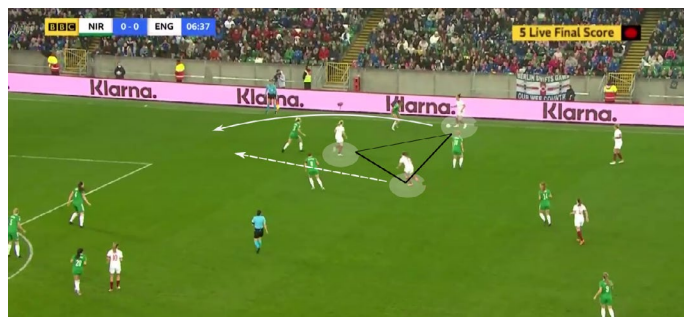
DEFENSIVE PHASE
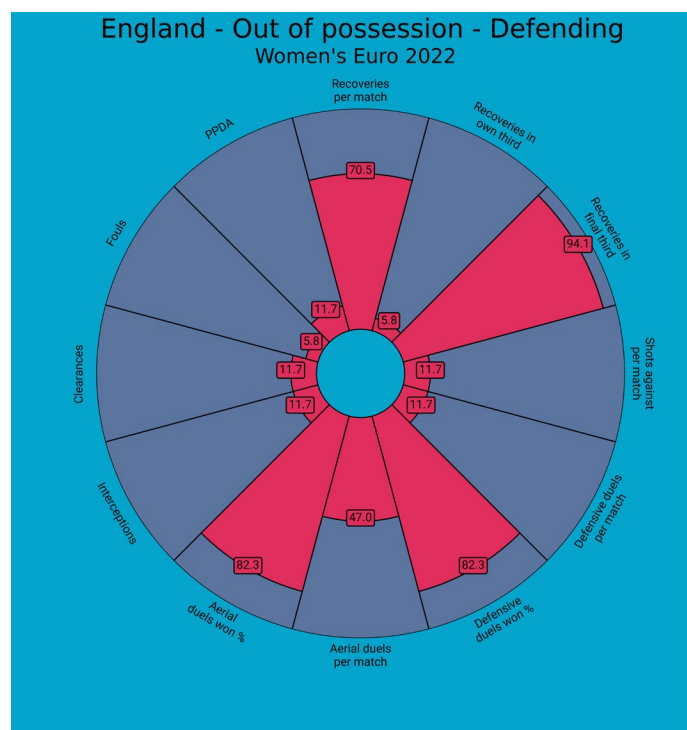
The Lionesses boast a formidable defensive record under Wiegman. They have conceded only two goals in 11 matches since last September. Despite many of these games being against weaker opposition, their ability to keep a clean sheet against a strong Spain side demonstrated England's defensive solidity.

As seen in the graph above, England can be classified as a pressing machine. They rank in a relatively high percentile for recoveries per match and an extremely high percentile for recoveries in the final third, while also winning a very high

number of their defensive duels. Their low PPDA further emphasizes how aggressively the team presses from the front as a unit, closing down spaces and passing lanes to win the ball back quickly high up the pitch and create goalscoring chances.

England's territorial dominance, pressing and desire to always play on the front foot requires the utmost levels of organisation, anticipation and awareness as well as high fitness levels. Naturally, teams that execute these sorts of tactics tend to play with a high defensive line to narrow down the pitch and suffocate their opponents in pressing situations.

In the game versus Spain, we can perfectly spot the team's high line with the back four situated on the halfway mark. The press is in full flow, Hemp intercepts the pass intended to the centre-back and manages to get a shot off which hits the post. England use Ellen White's natural instinct of playing on the front foot to apply pressure and dictate the areas to which their opponents pass the ball.

The team is also dominant in the air, winning a relatively high percentage of their aerial duels. Naturally, opposition teams will attempt many balls over the top when facing a high line. The physical presence of Bright, Greenwood and also Williamson is key to England's aerial dominance and ability to successfully implement this high line while hardly conceding any chances or goals.

TRANSITIONS

When England lose the ball in the opponent's half, they are drilled to counter-press and attempt to win it back high up the pitch — an aspect of the game they are unsurprisingly very successful at based on their recoveries in the final third as previously stated. Note how when the ball is lost below, every England player applies the pressure and cuts the passing lane towards the closest player(s) as well as closing down the ball carrier.


A big factor to succeed in counter-pressing is minimising the spaces between one another when in possession of the ball which can lead the front six to immediately form a compact block after a turnover.

When England win the ball back in their own half, they try to break out quickly and hit their opponents on the counter-attack.

Players will make movements to support the player in possession and give her several passing options to avoid the pressure coming from behind. Notice how in five seconds the ball makes its way from the back to the halfway line and takes out seven German defenders. Beth Mead had three clear passing options to choose from and ended up feeding the ball to the most dangerous area with plenty of space to attack.
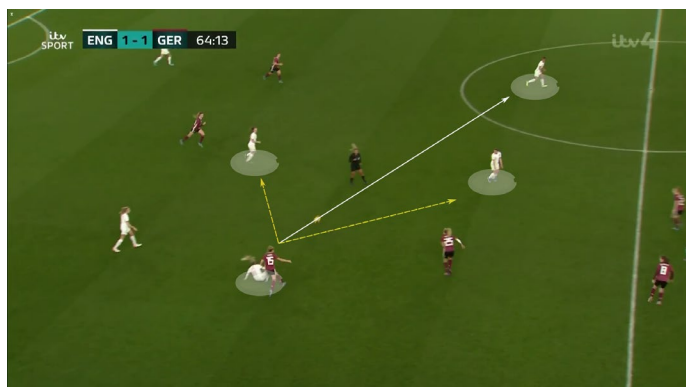
FORWARDS

As mentioned, England have scored 68 goals in eight World Cup qualifying games, 19 more than the second top scorers, Belgium. The team's front players have been on fire in front of goal, as well as attacking midfielders Georgia Stanway and Ella Toone. Beth Mead was the second top scorer in the qualifying rounds with 12 goals. Ellen White has chipped in with 10 goals and her experience (106 caps, 50 goals) will be key if England are going to have a chance of winning the tournament. Ella Toone has chipped in with 9 goals, while Georgia Stanway, Lauren Hemp and Beth England have all found the target 6 times.
Chloe Kelly has just returned from an ACL injury but has proved her fitness and earned a spot in the final squad.

One of England's opponents in the group will be Northern Ireland, a team that the Lionesses have beaten twice in the World Cup qualifiers by an aggregate score of 9-0. England will definitely be going into the Euros with extreme confidence, boasting one of, if not the deadliest strike forces in the world at the moment.

MIDFIELDERS

The Lionesses are spoilt for choice in midfield. Under Wiegman, the team has either shaped up in a double pivot in a 4-2-3-1 or with a midfield three in a 4-3-3 formation. Captain Leah Williamson and Manchester City's Keira Walsh seem like nailed-on starters. Williamson averages 88.4% pass accuracy and 3.89 interceptions per game while Walsh completes 88.9% of her passes and makes 3.24 interceptions per game. Their partnership proved very effective at the Arnold Clark Cup and England will be hoping this continues in the summer.

Wiegman will have a headache regarding the third midfield position. Would Ella Toone or Georgia Stanway be the better attacking midfielder? If she wants to lean towards experience, then we predict that Stanway will get the nod, with 31 caps under her belt to Toone's 13. Toone is a bigger goal threat, however, scoring 10 goals in only 13 games for the national team.

Fran Kirby is among England's best midfield players but faces a battle to prove she is ready to start come Euro 2022. Kirby has been struggling with fatigue but was part of the Chelsea squad for the FA Cup Final.

At 35 years of age, Jill Scott's best days are behind her. She has been included in the final 23-player squad but will probably start the majority of Euro 2022 matches on the bench. She is the second most capped player in England women's history with 156 caps. Her experienced head will be a positive and influential presence around the camp.

DEFENDERS

Former England captain Steph Houghton missed the majority of the season after struggling with an Achilles injury and has ultimately not made the cut. Millie Bright and Alex Greenwood are stalwarts for England in defence. They are likely to be flanked by Lucy Bronze and Demi Stokes in the full-back positions. As previously mentioned, the four of them share 261 caps between them and are also a goal threat from set-pieces.

Greenwood and Bright will provide a sense of calmness and safety in the build-up phase while their recovery tackles and aerial duels will be key to preventing counter-attacks and not getting caught in their high line. Bright averages 5.31 interceptions and wins around 73.9% of her aerial battles. At full-back, Bronze and Stokes will have a responsibility to bomb forward and support the wingers by making overlapping and underlapping runs, getting into crossing positions and supplying balls towards the strikers. Bronze averages 4.19 dribbles and 3.1 accurate crosses per game.

BEST PERFORMER
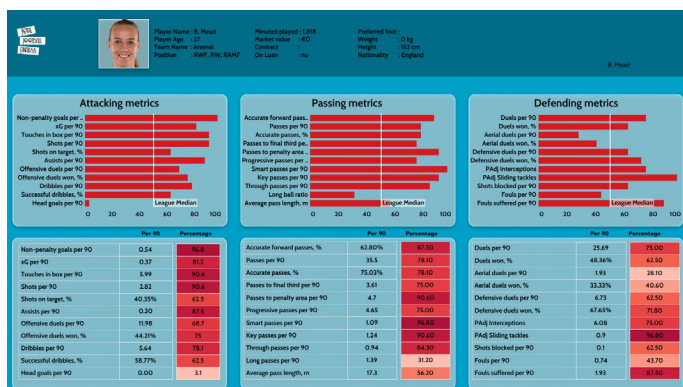
Arsenal's Beth Mead is tipped for a big Euro 2022 performance. Mead has represented England at every age level from the Under-15s to the senior team. The 27-year-old has scored

20 goals in only 36 caps for her country and has been a key figure in the team since Wiegman's appointment. She has scored three hat-tricks in the 2023 World Cup qualifiers under the Dutch boss — against Northern Ireland, Latvia and four goals in the 10-0 demolition of North Macedonia.

She can play in either of the wide forward positions and is a dangerous threat; she can get past her defender in 1v1 situations and supply balls towards Ellen White as well as make cutting runs into narrower areas and operate in the half-spaces in and around the box. The forward ranks above the league median in all attacking statistics except for headed goals, which is understandable for a winger; but it is an area that can be improved. With White being the focal point of the team, Mead's attacking metrics are top-notch, most notably her 0.54 non-penalty goals (ranking in the 96.8 percentile), 5.99 touches in the box and 2.82 shots per 90.

As for her passing metrics, she also ranks above the league median in all but one category — long ball ratio — the reason being that England's style of play is based on short passes, controlled possession, and unlocking gaps in defences to break them down. That is demonstrated in the smart passes, key passes and passes into the penalty area per 90 metrics which all rank in the 90th+ percentile.

Defensively, the only two areas in which Mead falls below the league median are aerial duels and aerial duels won %, which again highlight that heading the ball is not Mead's strong suit. England's aggressive pressing and high-energy defensive structure from the front mean that Mead engages in 25.69 duels (winning 48.36%) and makes 6.08 interceptions per game. She is also one of the most fouled players.

TOURNAMENT PREDICTION

Based on what has been discussed in this tactical analysis and given that England have a favourable group of Norway, Austria and Northern Ireland (ranking 11th, 21st and 46th in the FIFA rankings, respectively), the Lionesses will have huge expectations going into the competition. England have already defeated Austria once and Northern Ireland twice in their World Cup qualifying group. The latter side has never beaten England and haven't scored a goal against them since 1985.

Sweden, France, Germany, Netherlands, Spain and England sit highest in the FIFA rankings. The bookies fancy Jorge Vilda's Spain given many of their squad play for Barcelona, the 2022 Champions League finalists, but they only broke into the top ten of FIFA's rankings in 2021. Meanwhile, Sweden were most recently crowned silver medallists at the Olympics in Tokyo last summer, and have the highest FIFA ranking in the competition, placing second in the world behind the United States. The Netherlands have had the most impressive run in the sport's major competitions recently, winning Euro 2017 and finishing as runners-up in the 2019 World Cup. However, it will be interesting to see how they fare without now-England boss Sarina Wiegman.

Despite the Lionesses being the lowest-ranked of the European big guns, playing with a home advantage will undoubtedly better their chances in the competition and make them hope and dream of a Euro 2022 triumph in front of their fans, even if their chances of actually achieving success may not match up with the levels of expectation that will be placed upon them.

NORTHERN IRELAND:

GROUP A

KEVIN MARTIN // @KDW_Martin

Euro 2022 will be the very first major international finals that Northern Ireland have been represented at but life won't be easy for them on arrival on the grand stage as they have been handed a tough draw in group A with tournament hosts and World Cup semi-finalists England, World Cup quarter-finalists Norway and Euro 2017 semi-finalists Austria to contend with.

Northern Ireland qualified via the play-offs having finished second in qualifying Group C behind Norway. The Irish finished the qualification group level on points with Wales and with a vastly inferior goal difference. However, due to the head-to-head away goals tie breaker, a 0-0 draw at home and a 2-2 draw in the reverse fixture proved enough for them to scrape into second place. Ashley Hutton's 94th-minute headed equaliser in Newport turned out to be the decisive goal in clinching second place.

The side managed by Kenny Shiels entered the playoffs as the lowest-ranked second-placed team in qualifying (ninth out of nine) and were handed a favourable draw against the second lowest-ranked of the second-placed teams, Ukraine. Northern Ireland defeated them in both legs — 2-1 away before winning the return leg 2-0 — to seal a comfortable 4-1 win on aggregate.

Shiels' side have come up against all three of their Group A opponents in qualifying for Euro 2022 and next year's FIFA World Cup. When they met Norway, who topped their group in qualifying for this tournament, they lost 6-0 home and away. More recently, a 4-0 October defeat to England at Wembley was followed by a 5-0 thumping at home in April.

The matches against third-pot Austria represent Northern Ireland's best chance of a win this summer. It took a 92nd-minute equaliser in October from the Austrians to snatch a 2-2 draw in Belfast, and Northern Ireland had chances in their 3-1 defeat in Austria.

Shiels took over the national team in May 2019 with them ranked 59th in the world and despite facing numerous injuries and setbacks, he has pulled off a remarkable feat in guiding them to their first finals. The former Kilmarnock Men's team manager has been working on a full-time basis with 22 of his non-full-time Ireland-based players since January. He will be using the seven-month preparation period to bridge the gap with his side's formidable opponents but making it beyond the group stage is a big ask of an already overachieving team.

PREDICTED STARTING XI

Northern Ireland Squad age profile

At the time of writing, Northern Ireland had not named an official squad for the tournament. This 28-player squad list is based on who's likely to be picked for the final squad from the 22-player training camp and from those playing full-time in Scotland, England and the United States, who have been picked in previous squads.

This age profile chart divides the squad into three age brackets – young players (aged 24 and under), players in their peak (24 to 30) and experienced (aged 30 and over). As can be

seen, the predicted squad has a good balance in terms of age and experience.

Nine players will be at their peak age for the tournament with around 11, depending on how many make Shiels' final selection, young players. These young players may inject some valuable energy during a tournament with short turnarounds between matches.

Northern Ireland have seven players on the experienced edge of the scale, five of whom are 33 or over. With qualification for next year's World Cup looking very unlikely, several players will no doubt be making their final appearances for their country at this summer's tournament.

Goalkeeper Jacqueline Burns, defenders Rebecca Holloway, Laura Rafferty, Sarah Robson (née McFadden), Demi Vance, midfielder Rachel Furness and forwards Simone Magill and Kerry Beattie, who are all full-time professionals, are likely to join up with those selected from the training camp.

Glentoran centre forward Casey Howe is unlikely to be included. The 19-year-old has had a strong start to the domestic season, but being omitted from the seven-month training camp appeared to have ended her hopes of being involved.

Rangers' Megan Bell and Glentoran's Caragh Hamilton, two would-be regulars, are also set to miss out. The midfielders have picked up long-term injuries which have cruelly ruled them both out of the tournament.

However, Ashley Hutton has returned to action for Linfield after 10 months out with a cruciate ligament injury. Should the centre-back's recovery stay on track, there's little doubt Shiels will select her. Her 111 caps could provide invaluable experience to the group.

Given the quality of the opposition and how Shiels has set his team out before, it is expected that he will use a 3-5-2/5-3-2 in at least two of the group stage matches. This is a system they have used against each of their Euro 2022 opponents in the past.

Jacqueline Burns, who plies her trade in the Swedish Damallsvenskan for BK Häcken, is Northern Ireland's first-choice goalkeeper. The 18-cap stopper is good with her feet and is comfortable joining in the build-up play. Often positioning herself as an auxiliary centre-back, she can join in the build-up play closer to the halfway line than her box.

The back-five is packed with experience with Demi Vance (31), Sarah McFadden (35) and Julie Nelson (37). Plus, the possible addition of Hutton (34) gives the team plenty of experience to fall back on. Abbey Magee, who plays for Linfield, also has a good chance of a starting spot at right

wing-back having started last time out against England.

The central midfield area is one of the stronger areas of the team with captain Marissa Callaghan, Liverpool's Rachel Furness, and Glentoran's Chloe McCarron all providing decent options. The 20-year-old Joely Andrews could also start having played a part in recent matches versus England and Austria.

Lauren Wade and Simone Magill appear to be Shiels' favoured pairing when playing with a front two. The experienced pair work well alongside each other up front both in and out of possession. Kerry Beattie, who was the top scorer in the Northern Irish Premiership last season and has been in top goalscoring form for her new club side Glasgow City this season, is likely to feature from the bench.

Shiels likes to utilise his squad and has used the maximum of five substitutions in seven of his last eight competitive matches. He usually changes most of his front five, all of whom have to work extremely hard in the 3-5-2/5-3-2 system. This will give plenty of opportunities for his other attacking players to impress coming off the bench.

ATTACKING PHASE

Northern Ireland - In possession - Attacking
Women's Euro 2022
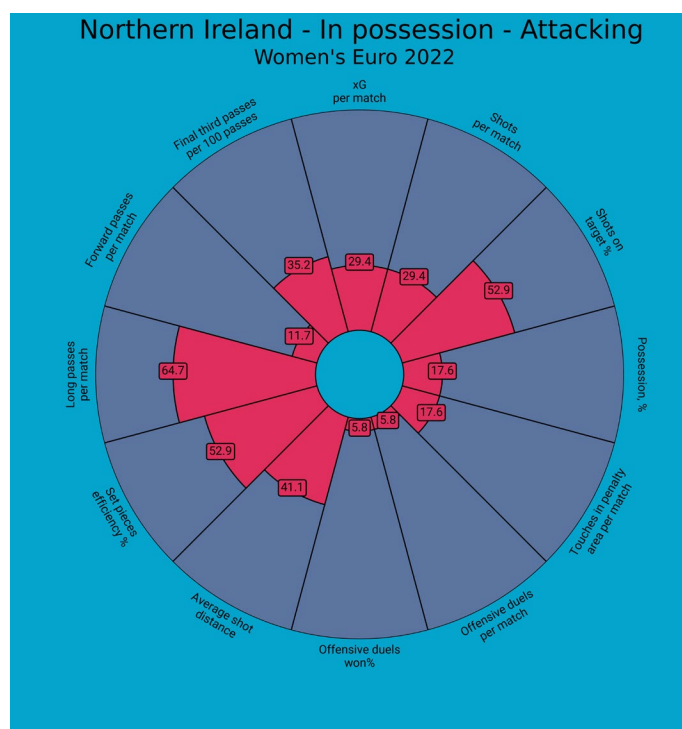
The above graphic shows attacking statistics from the previous calendar year in relation to the other teams that have qualified for Euro 2022. Northern Ireland are ranked in the 17.6 percentile for possession. This indicates they can expect to spend the vast majority of their time without the ball this summer. This was clear in their home meeting with Austria where they averaged just 37.51% possession; they saw that drop to 27% against England.

Northern Ireland's xG per match also places them in the bottom third of teams participating in the finals. In their two recent matches against the Lionesses, Northern Ireland produced a goalscoring output of 0.09 xG at home and 0 xG in London. With those figures, Northern Ireland would expect to score just one goal for every 11 times they face England.

The three goals Northern Irelands have scored against Austria and most of their chances created against their group stage opponents have come from set-plays and counterattacks, which will

be covered in the transitions section. With the likelihood they will be pressed high, this section is going to focus on how they will overcome the high press and create goalscoring opportunities.
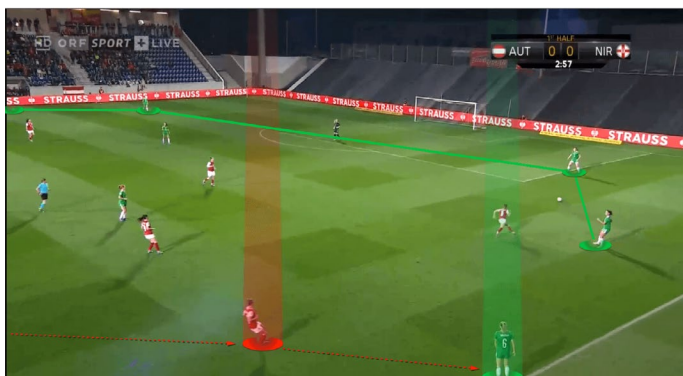
When playing out from the back, Northern Ireland play short passes in the build-up phase to encourage the opposition to press before exploiting the space behind them. Often, this is done by playing as few as one or two passes in their defensive third before playing a long ball in behind the opposition back-line.

Against Austria away, there was a clear game plan to target the area behind Austria's full-backs who pressed aggressively and high up the pitch. To encourage the full-backs to press high, Northern Ireland, who were in a 4-3-3 at the time, had their forwards play low when the ball was on their side of the pitch.

The centre-forward occupied the two centre-backs, preventing them from shifting across to cover for their full-back. This created a large area of space for the goalkeeper or defenders to target with a long ball.
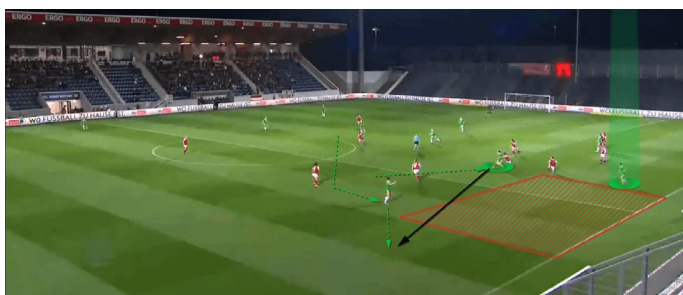
This image shows the left-forward in a low position just after her left-back had the ball. The left-back passed the ball into the feet of the centre-forward who had dropped deep to

receive it. As the centre-forward picked up the ball, a central midfielder, on the blindside of the opposition midfield, made a run in behind the opposition right-back and right centre-back who had both been dragged out of position.

The Irish had several variations of movements and used different personnel to exploit the space they had created. The wide-forward herself would spin into the space and, when the ball was in wide areas, the ball would be played into the channel for the centre forward to chase down.

Even when no goalscoring opportunities came of it, it was a good way to relieve pressure and get the team higher up the pitch. There have, however, been times that the longer passes have been under-hit, resulting in a turnover of possession inside Northern Ireland's half. Due to the spread-out positioning of the players, they can be left vulnerable in these situations.

When the opposition drops off into a mid-block, Northern Ireland's goalkeeper, Burns, has turned into an extra centre-back in the build-up phase. By positioning herself between the centre-backs in a 4-3-3, she allowed the centre-backs to split wider and the full-backs to push higher up the pitch.

The full-backs, being in more advanced positions, meant the front three could play closer together on top of the opposition centre-backs. This created a front five on the opposition back-line.

Whilst this did cause problems, with Austria being overloaded all over the pitch, the risks of

this structure are obvious. Indeed, after having a spell on top where they should have equalised, it was from this scenario that possession was given away and Austria scored their second goal. A sloppy pass from the centre-back to the goalkeeper was intercepted by the forward who went on to score and ended Northern Ireland's chances in the match.

DEFENSIVE PHASE
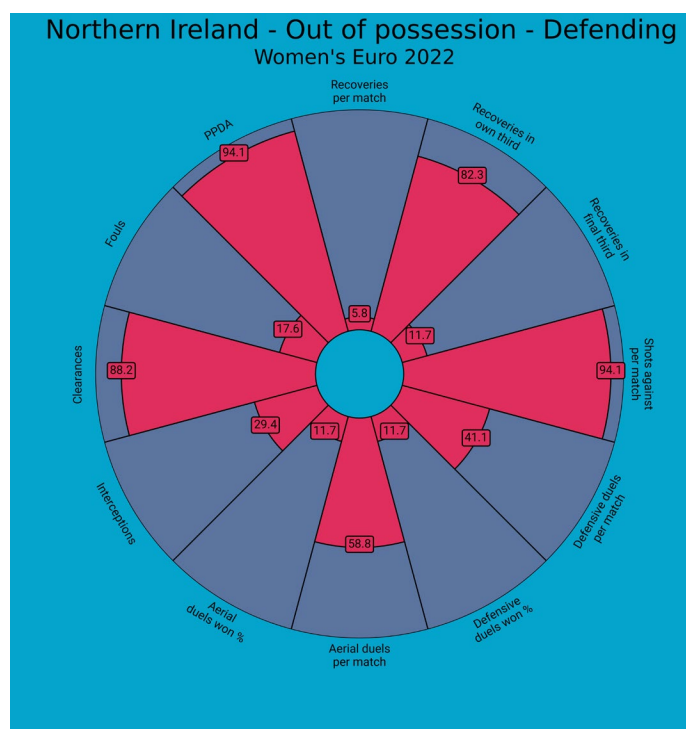
Against all their Group A opponents, Northern Ireland have spent, and will expect to spend again this summer, most of the match without the ball. As their PPDA percentile of 94.1 suggests, Shiels is content for his side to allow the opposition comfortable possession in certain areas of the pitch. This is underlined by their ranking in the 11.7th percentile for recoveries in their final third and 82.3 in their own third.

This is, of course, due to the set-up of the team, but, as will be covered in the transitions section, they are aggressive in stepping up to players and intercepting the ball in these areas.
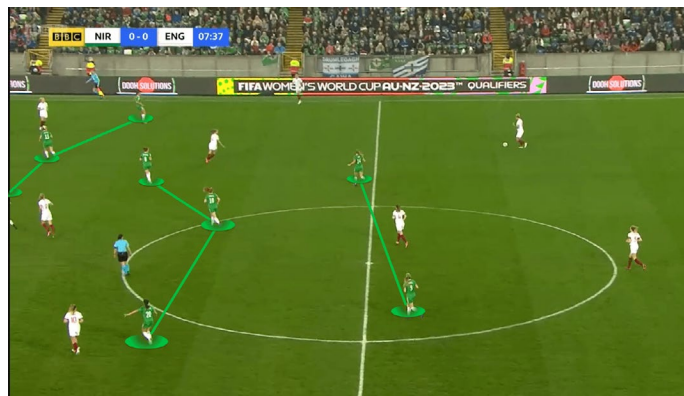
Northern Ireland defend in a 5-3-2 mid-block, allowing the opposition to have the ball in their half. The midfield and forwards play close to one another, crowding the midfield, whilst leaving the wide areas largely unoccupied. The back-five remains as a unit with any of them rarely pressing more than 10 yards ahead of their defensive line.

One of the two forwards presses the opposition's centre-backs whilst the other marks the opposition's deepest midfield player. Should the centre back pass to her defensive partner, the forward on the DMC presses the ball with the other taking over marking the DMC.

When the ball is central, the DMC, number '10' Furness, plays more advanced than her two central midfielders. This allows her to press the opposition's DMC when either of her forwards is not close enough to the DMC to prevent her from getting on the ball. When the ball goes into the wide areas, Furness drops behind her central midfielders into a more traditional DMC position.

The back five are positioned close enough to their midfielders to deny space for the opposition forwards to drop into and receive the ball. They are also deep enough that they are well-positioned to deal with any long balls over the top. The wing-backs mark the opposition wide-forwards and do not usually press the opposition's full-backs unless they receive the ball very high up the pitch.
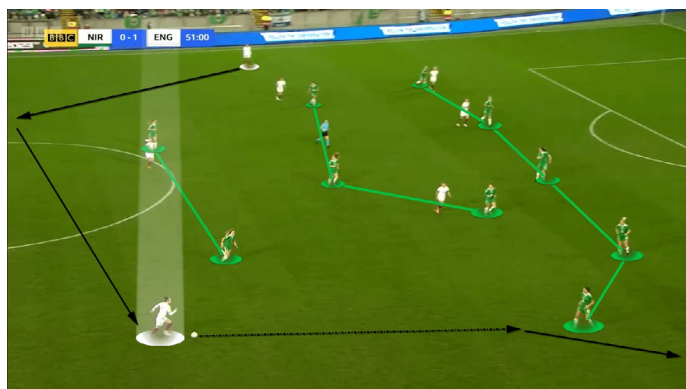
When ball goes into the wide areas just inside Northern Ireland's half, the front five overload that side of the pitch. If the forwards are close enough, one will press the ball. If not, then the closest midfielder will, with Furness offering security behind her. Should the ball be progressed down the same side, Northern Ireland are still comfortable. The back five has not been stretched and the three centre-backs, who all remain central, are generally good at dealing with crosses into the box.

The main issue, shown in the tactical image, is when they allow the opposition to switch the ball out of one wide area. With the front five so condensed on one side, it is very difficult for them to cover the distance required to press the opposite full-back. With the wingback being pinned by the opposition's wide forward on her outside, she is unable to step up to the opposition full-back on the ball.

In this scenario, the fullback progressed 40 yards with the ball at her feet before being engaged. At that point, she combined with her wide-forward and then provided the cutback for a goal. Although a clear deficiency in the system, Shiels will feel the shape still provided more than enough bodies in the goal area when the ball entered the box to deal with the situation.
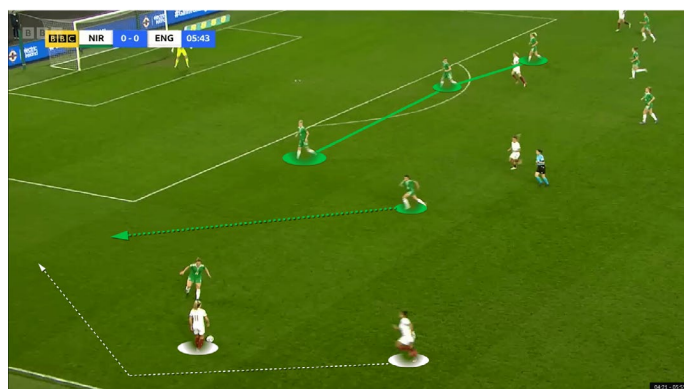
When the opposition has the ball in deeper areas, in and around Northern Ireland's box, the midfield condenses the central area and forces the ball into wide areas. When the ball enters the wide area, the ball-near wing-back closes the player on the ball down quickly.

When the wingback presses, her centre-backs remain central which creates a gap between the wing-back and side centre-back. If the opposition has an overlapping full-back trying to exploit this gap, the ball-near central midfielder drops between her wing-back and centre-back to cover the run.

This allows the three centre-backs to remain central and stay well-positioned to deal with any cross into the box.

This overlapping movement was used as a decoy by England to empty the area in front of the centre-backs in the middle of the pitch. When the wide forward received the ball, she cut inside as her full-back was overlapping. From here, the wide forward combined with her forwards at the edge of the box. This caused a centre-back to jump to the ball which left space in behind for the wide-forward to receive.

TRANSITIONS

Given the quality of the opposition and Northern Ireland's expected set-up, it is likely, along with set-plays, that counterattacks represent their best opportunity to score. Spending large spells of their matches without the ball, in a mid to low block and with the bulk of their turnovers occurring in their defensive third, these attacks will emerge from deeper areas.

This image shows a typical counterattack from their low-block which resulted in a goal in their home meeting with Austria. When in their compact defensive unit, they are aggressive in stepping forward to intercept passes. When the ball is intercepted, they play forward immediately and look to hit in behind at the first possible opportunity.

Here, Furness intercepts a ball intended for the opposition's centre forward. After taking two quick touches, the ball is sent in behind Austria's high backline — the wide-forward subsequently runs onto the pass and scores.

On other occasions, Northern Ireland, whilst still going forward immediately, will dribble forward with the ball instead of passing or playing long straight away. This attack originated from inside their box. A sliding interception was turned into a pass to Furness, who calmly dribbled out of the opposition's counter-press before finding a pass into her forwards feet.

The forward turned with the ball and drove at the nearest opposition centre-back, pinning her in place, whilst her teammate made a diagonal run in behind the ball-near centre-back. This dragged the ball-far centre-back out of the central area leaving space for the advancing forward to attack with the ball. A major benefit of Shiels' system including two central forwards is they can work together in these situations instead of one striker being isolated.

Northern Ireland look most dangerous from counterattacks, especially against the top teams when they dribble out of pressure. Although they scored against Austria from a long ball, they are overall too wasteful with these hopeful passes and fail to take the opportunity to at least relieve the pressure on their defence.
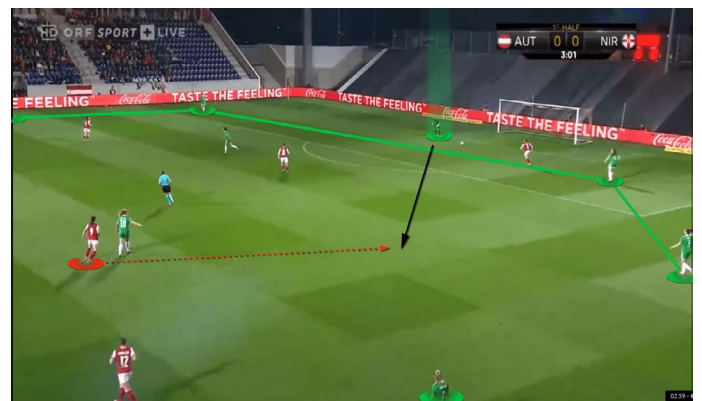
During the build-up phase, Northern Ireland are very expansive which leaves big gaps between players. Although generally, they look comfortable playing out from the back, there are times, usually when they try to play long, that they allow the opposition to intercept the ball.

This image shows Burns trying to play long to her forward after a couple of short passes around

the back. The opposition central midfielder reads the under-hit pass and intercepts it. At the point of interception, the midfielder has a clear path towards goal and, at the very least, a clear chance to score looks inevitable.

Within five seconds, the backline has very quickly reorganised itself between the ball and the goal, the midfielders have applied pressure to the ball and the danger has been completely smothered.

Northern Ireland's immediate reaction to defensive transitions is clearly something they work on. Although a more clinical team may punish them in these situations, something that happens far too often, the reaction to getting players back behind the ball and defending the goal is impressive.

DEFENDERS

Northern Ireland's defence is a well-organised unit full of players who are now well used to lining up next to one another. They fit perfectly into Shiels' style of play by being able to play out from the back as well as sit-back and defend crosses and long balls.

They are also capable of defending on the front foot, stepping out to prevent forwards from turning, and intercepting and launching counterattacks from deep areas. One of their more effective outlets for counterattacks is the left wing-back, Demi Vance, who is a powerful runner with the ball at her feet and can carry the ball long distances.

Shiels' main concern about his backline will be the way England's forwards were able to pull them so easily out of position and get in behind the wingbacks. Northern Ireland's success against their neighbouring rivals may come down to how well their wingbacks defend in one-on-one situations.

MIDFIELDERS

Shiels' midfield in each match will no doubt contain captain Callaghan and key player Furness, with McCarron, Andrews and Caldwell rotating for the third spot. The rotation of the midfield may well prove vital throughout their three group matches with the amount of running their playing system demands of them.

The midfield is expected to press the entire width of the pitch at times to allow their wingback to remain connected with the centre-backs. They also close down the opposition's deepest central midfielder and fill gaps between their backline. In possession, they must be willing to make runs beyond the opposition's defenders as well as supporting counterattacks.

FORWARDS

As with their midfielders, Northern Ireland's front two are required to do a lot of running, especially during the pressing phase, and will therefore need to be rotated both within and between matches. Fatigue was evident as early as the 60th minute of their match against England as the front 2 were dragged to one side of the pitch and didn't have the energy to chase the ball back across. This allowed England's centre-back to step out of the back with the ball at her feet and play a through ball to her wide forward who went on to finish.

It was Kirsty McGuiness who came on against England to inject some much-needed energy after the starting two had begun to tire and she'll no doubt be well utilised at the finals. Holloway and Sam Kelly are two others that we can expect to see lead the line at some point. The forwards will perhaps be judged more on how well they press rather than goals scored as their goalscoring opportunities are going to be at a premium.

BEST PERFORMER

Northern Ireland's number '10' Rachel Furness has scored 38 international goals from midfield in 81 appearances and is the country's all-time top goal scorer. The Liverpool playmaker played a part in her club's promotion back to the WSL for next season, as they won the 2021-21 FA Women's Championship. Born and raised in Sunderland, England, Furness chose to represent Northern Ireland after being denied the chance of a trial for England.

As the graphic illustrates, Furness outperforms the league median in almost all metrics when playing for her club side. The 33-year-old plays a similar role for club and country and can be described as a box-to-box midfield player. As her stats back up, she can both defend and attack at a high level.

For a midfield player, Furness's international goals record is exceptional — she can score all types of goals. As well as finishing from outside the box and arriving late in the box to get on the end of crosses, she is a real threat from set plays. The Mak'em has scored four goals for club and country this season by getting on the end of set-play crosses, including a bullet header which came against Luxembourg.

In addition to scoring goals, the all-rounder in midfield has made 0.40 assists per 90 minutes. She has assisted nine goals this season, including a typically clever through ball for Northern Ireland's opener against Macedonia last November.

During the build-up phase, Furness is often the player that picks the ball up from the centre-backs and launches attacks. She is comfortable both passing the ball out from the back and carrying the ball forward. She often receives the ball in tight areas and is able to dribble past the first line of pressure before finding a teammate.

Although defensive duels are not her strong point, she is capable of getting stuck in and putting a strong tackle in when necessary. She is also good at using her upper body strength to hold off opponents and retain possession.

TOURNAMENT PREDICTION

Northern Ireland's best chance of winning a match at the tournament clearly comes against Austria. They have run them close in their two recent meetings and will feel they should have got more out of both recent matches. Away from home, the Irish were on top and had two opportunities to equalise with the score at 0-1. At home, victory was cruelly snatched away from them by a 92nd-minute Stefanie Enzinger header.

A victory against either of the powerhouses of England or Norway would surely go down as one of the finest in Northern Irish football history. Shiels will be hoping the derby feel of a tie against England may inspire the Irish to the game of their lives. They also have the added advantage of playing all their games at one venue, St Mary's Stadium in Southampton. Perhaps the ground will begin to feel like home by the time they face The Lionesses in their third game on July 15th.

Shiels being able to work with much of the group on a full-time basis helps their cause. However, the country's route to the finals — being the lowest-ranked side in the competition — and recent results against their direct opponents suggest that anything other than fourth place in the group would be a real achievement for the Green and White Army.

NORWAY:

GROUP A:

SELIM BEN HMIDA // @mrziguen

Norway Women's national team are making their final preparations ahead of Euro 2022 which will be held in England from July 6th to July 31st 2022, and they have high hopes in relation to their participation in such a glorious tournament as they believe in their ability to put on solid performances and compete with the other top European national teams. Norway have got what it takes to do well in this competition and reach the advanced stages of it, knowing that most players in this team are at their peak or close to reaching their peak in terms of performances and form. Names like Lyon's Ada Hegerberg, Barcelona's Caroline Hansen and Chelsea's Guro Reiten could be the ones who will lead Norway to achieve one of their greatest results in this Euros, knowing that the quality of player the team has at their disposal in each section has significantly improved compared to the past.

It should be said that the three mentioned players, in particular, have had one of the best overall seasons of their respective careers so far. Reiten put on numerous excellent performances with her team in the FAWSL, helping them lift the title and win their battle with Arsenal. She was one of the fundamental players for Chelsea as she scored some important goals and supported the attack with assists regularly, especially from the left-wing — a position from which she usually shines and finds her best form.

Moreover, Hansen continued to be a key player for Barcelona just as she had done in previous campaigns. Her consistent level of performance and the danger she is always able to create from the right wing distinguish her from most other wingers. In reality, Hansen can be considered one of the best right-wingers in the world at the moment and she has proven that on several occasions both for Barcelona and for Norway. In addition to her excellent dribbling, passing and shooting skills, this player has the personality needed to lead her teammates in the best

possible way and of course, being a captain is not something new to her. Hansen is also a very tactical player who can interpret different roles accurately. Although she is used to the 4-3-3 formation at Barcelona, Norway's head coach, Martin Sjögren, used her as a second striker alongside Hegerberg recently to exploit both players' experience and excellent finishing skills. Sjögren will most probably continue using both players together as an attacking duo as this seems like Norway's best-suited formation for the Euros, the 4-4-2.

If you're wondering why we haven't said a word about Hegerberg, then just wait for the ninth section of the article where we analyse Norway's key/best player's characteristics in detail and aim to shed some light on how she can be crucial for her team.

Although Norway were knocked out at the group stage in the 2017 UEFA Women's Championship, the team has got a long successful history in this competition and can be considered one of the most consistent teams in terms of participation and performance. They lifted the trophy twice, in 1987 and 1993, respectively, and finished as runners-up four times — the last being in 2013. Moreover, Norway reached the semifinals three times. Norway's challenge now is to reach similar stages in the competition despite the existence of competitive teams who can put them in danger.

Norway will be playing in Group A alongside hosts England, as well as Austria and Northern Ireland. This group might seem relatively easy in terms of advancement for Norway, but it could be tricky and they mustn't underestimate the challengers in front of them. England will surely be a tough team to face for Norway and this might be the group's most difficult game. At the same time, Norway should underestimate neither Austria nor Northern Ireland as both teams are capable of causing Norway real problems.

PREDICTED STARTING XI

Norway have played their last two FIFA Women's World Cup qualification games in a 4-4-2 formation and although the team was set up in other formations for previous games, including the 3-4-3 and 4-2-3-1, this 4-4-2 suits the team best as it guarantees balance between the defensive and attacking aspects.

For the goalkeeper role, Guro Pettersen will more likely be Sjögren's first choice in this tournament knowing the experience she has compared to the two other called-up goalkeepers, Sunniva Skoglund and Aurora Mikalsen. In defence, Inter defender Anja Sønstevold will more likely be the team's right-back in this tournament as she has

been performing consistently well of late. At the same time, Maren Mjelde will surely get some playing minutes, especially when facing tougher opposition but she is unlikely to start given that she is still not 100% fit following her long recovery period between last season and this one. Manchester United's Maria Thorisdóttir and Guro Bergsvand are the favourites to form a defensive duo and be the team's regular centre-backs, knowing the experience and defensive talent these two players possess. The midfield will most likely be composed of Barcelona's Ingrid Syrstad Engen and Manchester United's Vilde Bøe Risa, as the two of them have had excellent seasons at their respective clubs. It should be said, however, that leaving Emilie Haavi out of the squad raises a lot of questions as the Norwegian player enjoyed an excellent second half of the season after joining Serie A Women's Roma. The wingers will be Guro Reiten and Amalie Eikeland, while Frida Maanum can be a very useful sub. Then, the attacking duo will be made up of Hegerberg and Hansen — the two players who are more likely to carry out the larger part of the attacking work, especially inside the box.
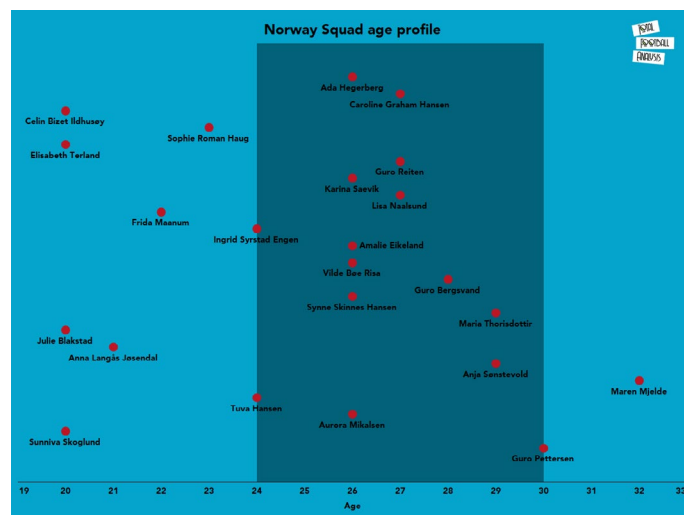
Norway's squad is mostly comprised of players in their best footballing years, with most of them at their or nearing what you'd expect to be their peak age. Mjelde, at 32, brings plenty of experience to the table whilst also still being able to perform very well. Most of the team's starters are between 24 and 30, which are the best years for a football player in terms of physical condition

as well as in terms of footballing intelligence and experience. At this age, players tend to be more precise in their decision-making compared to their earlier years; that would help Norway a lot in this tournament. The fact that most players are physically fit will also help the team a lot, especially in defensive and attacking duels.

ATTACKING PHASE

Norway - In possession - Attacking
Women's Euro 2022
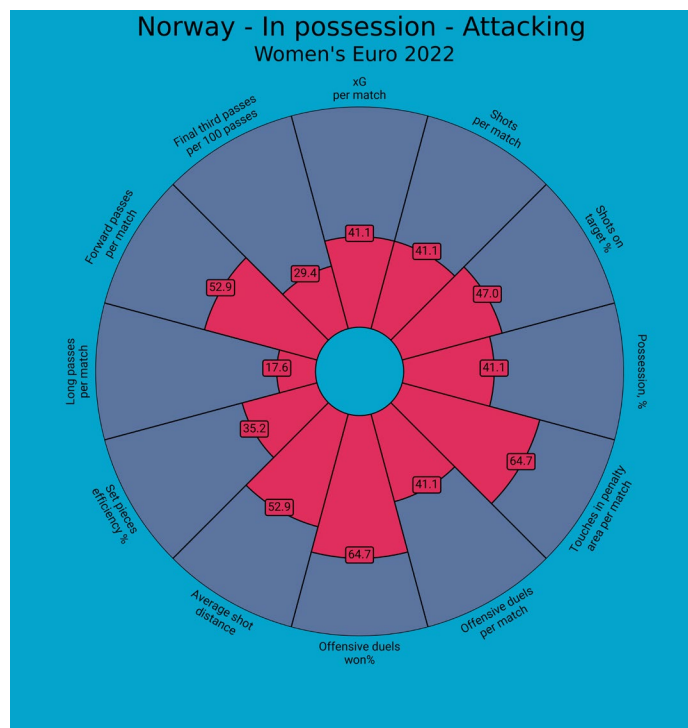
Based on the above graphic, Norway do not focus their tactics on having possession, with their average possession rate percentile ranking at 41.1. What they usually do is use forward passes frequently and, as soon as they gain possession, attempt to reach the penalty box as quickly as possible, knowing that the attacking players are physically strong enough to keep hold of the ball, win in offensive duels and exchange the ball until finding a shooting opportunity. That's exactly what this graphic tells us since the team wins a fairly large portion of their offensive duels with a similar rate of touches inside the box per match. To link this to reality, the following picture from the match against Kosovo shows how many Norway players were inside the box during one of their attacks. Six players were inside the box waiting

for a pass and providing passing options to their teammate on the ball. This shows how Norway can be very dangerous once they reach the box and given that they have quality finishers with great off-the-ball movement, their opponents will have a hard time stopping such attacks.

In the previous action, the pass was sent to Hegerberg who knew how to position herself very well without entering an offside position. This is one of the things that highlight Hegerberg's intelligent off-the-ball movement. As a result of this quality, Norway's head coach often instructs his players to focus on Hegerberg's movements and try to serve her well, given that the whole team trust her outstanding finishing abilities.

Here is another example of how Hegerberg's movement provides passing options to her teammates in the final third. Having players like Vilde Bøe Risa and Engen in midfield helps a lot as they both have great vision and ability to provide key passes regularly. In this goal action, Vilde Bøe Risa received the ball from her teammate in a crucial position and decided to pass to Hegerberg immediately after controlling the ball, as she saw her starting to accelerate towards the box. The quick and accurate decision-making of Vilde Bøe Risa, Hansen, Reiten, and Engen will be extremely important in this part of the pitch, especially against teams who know how to defend well; such passing decisions can be crucial, at times.

In addition, Hansen's excellent crossing skills, along with her ability to surpass players in offensive duels, will be extremely useful for Norway as Hansen can be very dangerous even when facing two or three defenders. In the following action, she was able to get around almost four defenders by going externally and escaping from her markers before crossing accurately to Hegerberg despite being disturbed and having neither time nor space to raise her head and point out where she should cross. This natural chemistry between both Hansen and Hegerberg can help the team a lot in front of goal.

DEFENSIVE PHASE
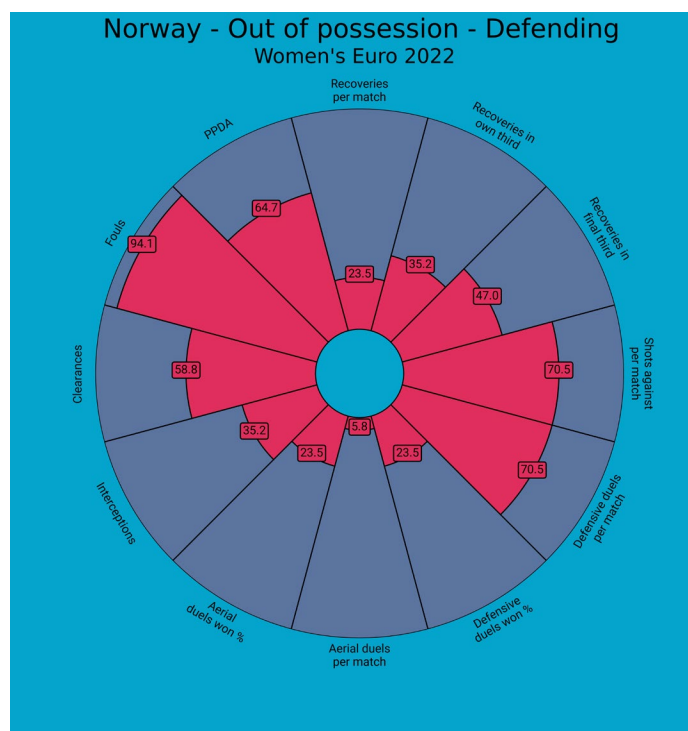
Taking a look at this graphic, it may be quite worrying for Norway that they concede a lot of shots per match while also committing a lot of fouls. Norway are capable of improving this aspect ahead and even during the competition, as they will have to prevent teams from creating shot opportunities too easily. The defensive line will also have to improve their defensive duels rates and especially their averages in the air, as they are relatively weak in these aspects which their opponents could look to exploit. Working on the aerial duels will be extremely important to avoid conceding goals from set-pieces and stop the danger of strikers who are excellent from headers.

In the following example from Norway's match against Poland, we can notice how Norway left some huge gaps in their defence, which was a remarkable marking mistake from both centre-backs as well as from the team's right-back. This mistake led to a conceded goal, and should these positioning errors continue in the Euros, Norway will likely concede similar goals, especially when facing quick attacking players with good movement and teams that rely mainly on counter-attacks.
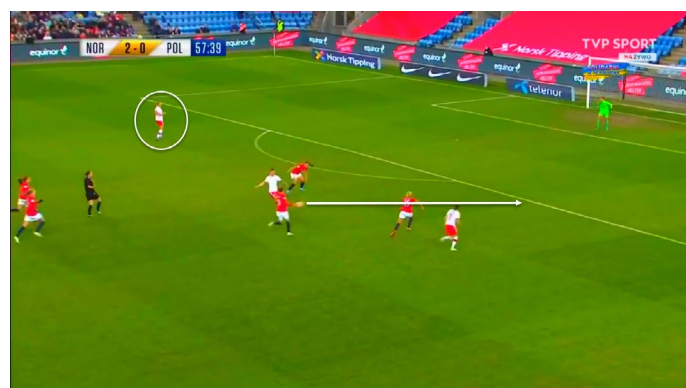
Moreover, Norway's centre-backs and full-backs will have to be more attentive and reactive in their defensive duels against attackers at times as they're at risk of enduring a difficult time against quick players such as Hemp, for instance. In the following example, we see that Norway's centre-backs often wait too long before making a decision concerning their interceptions or tackles, letting the opponents have plenty of time for shooting or passing — and that's not acceptable for a team that wants to challenge at the business end of this competition. Norway's

defenders will have to be more decisive in their decisions to stop their opponents and oblige them to consider the least dangerous option.

TRANSITIONS

Engen and Vilde Bøe Risa are the key players in the team's transitions, and they are the players who are especially responsible for launching counter-attacks. The second most important players in this aspect are the wingers, Reiten and Eikeland, as these two are often required to drop, receive the ball in their own half and advance with it until reaching Hansen and Hegerberg. The key element in transitions will be quick and accurate passing, given that these two attributes shining on the counter-attack could be fatal for any defence. It's good for Norway is that their players' passing accuracy is good enough to help them be always dangerous in counter-attacks.

Here is an example where the team launched a counter-attack via Hansen after intercepting the ball. She immediately gave it to Reiten, who started running centrally and waited for Hansen herself and Hegerberg to advance before providing a through pass to one of them. Such actions often repeat for Norway and they are usually able to create danger from them.

FORWARDS

Norway have indeed got plenty of skilful attacking players who are excellent in terms of passing and duels as well. Nevertheless, the team lacks some quality in shooting and especially in terms of shot accuracy. Hegerberg has got 56.9% in terms of shots on target while Hansen's rate is 43.7%. For Reiten, her shot accuracy rate equals 39.9%.

These statistics confirm the fact that Norway's attacking players are not very consistent in terms of shots on target. This doesn't mean that they are not capable of shooting well. What is needed is to be more focused in front of goal and to avoid shooting off-target to not regret the created chances during the tournament.

Moreover, the team needs to create some variety upfront and not fully rely on Hegerberg. A variety in movements and passing combinations would surprise defenders and free Hegerberg more often. However, looking for Hegerberg all the time could make it more difficult for her to get the ball and to win in duels. It would be more dangerous if Norway use early crosses at times, through passes to Hegerberg at other times, and alternated between penetrations from Reiten, Hansen, and Eikeland. Norway has got plenty of attacking ideas and systems that they could use to be unpredictable, which would make them more dangerous.

MIDFIELDERS

Norway's midfield can be the team's most powerful area, as players like Engen and Vilde Bøe Risa are among the best in Europe. Their mission, however, will not be easy as they will have plenty of defensive duties knowing that they will play in front of defence most of the time.

Moreover, these players' mission will be to link up with the wingers and the strikers continuously and aim at reaching the final third. Engen's passes to the final third accuracy sits at 77.8% while her passes to the penalty box accuracy rate is 57.5%. This shows that the team can rely on a player like Engen for linking defence to attack while trusting in her ability to always provide accurate passes. Although her average passes towards the box are not bad, the coaching staff can work with her and Vilde Bøe Risa to ensure the average accuracy rate of such passes increases, which would help the team reach the box more frequently thanks to the support of the central midfielders.
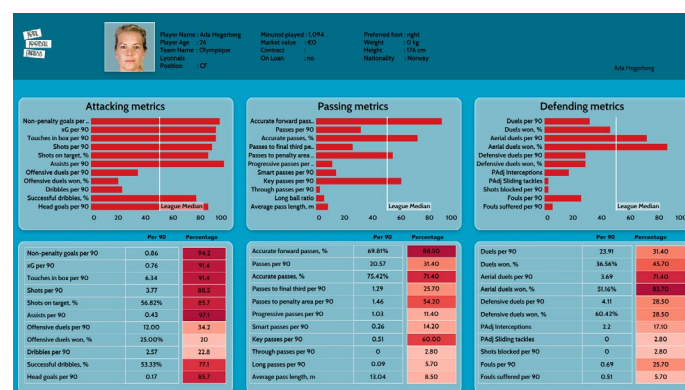
Also, Reiten and Eikeland's help in the defensive and the attacking phases will be fundamental as these two players will have to support the full-backs in defence, especially when conceding a numerical superiority, while at the same time remaining present in counter-attacks and build-up. Their dribbling and passing abilities need to be on point to create a surplus in attack and serve one of Hegerberg or Hansen whenever needed.

DEFENDERS

Norway's defence is solid but also raises some questions in terms of marking. The defensive line often concedes numerous shots per match and this is a worrying statistic that should be fixed shortly. Although players like Thorisdóttir and Bergsvand compose a strong defensive duo, they will have to be more attentive during this tournament since they will have to mark some dangerous attacking players who can cause numerous issues to this defence. The two centre-backs will have to ensure that they have an advantage over their direct opponents and anticipate their movements with or without the ball; additionally, they have to be aggressive enough to win in aerial duels more than they do currently.

Thorisdóttir wins 62.3% in aerial duels per match and 62.3% in duels while Bergsvand wins 60.1% in aerial duels and 61.4% in duels. These stats are good enough for these players who are capable of doing better especially when they are helped by the full-backs. In this regard, both Blakstad and Sønstevold need to cover for their teammates and make sure to prevent their direct opponents from cutting inside and reaching the box. Their main mission is to clear the danger from the wings and disturb their opponents eventually leading them to either losing the ball or crossing it inaccurately. To do this, they will have to remain focused over the 90 minutes and have a balance between their advancements to support the attack and their defensive duties. One benefit of the 4-4-2, in this case, is that both full-backs can be instructed to not advance and remain in defence since both wingers can provide the necessary depth in attack. The full-backs would only be invited to advance when attempting to create numerical superiority on the wings and attract more defenders, therefore, creating space inside the box.

BEST PERFORMER

Player Name: Ada Hegerberg		Preferred foot: right
Player Age: 26		Weight: 0 kg
Team Name: Olympique Lyonnais		Height: 178 cm
Position: CF		Nationality: Norway
Minutes played: 1,094	Market value: €0	
Contract: no	On Loan: no	

Ada Hegerberg

Attacking metrics

	Per 90	Percentage
Non-penalty goals per 90	0.86	94.3
xG per 90	0.76	91.4
Touches in box per 90	6.34	91.4
Shots per 90	3.77	88.5
Shots on target, %	56.82%	65.7
Assists per 90	0.43	97.1
Offensive duels per 90	12.00	34.2
Offensive duels won, %	25.00%	20
Dribbles per 90	2.57	22.8
Successful dribbles, %	53.33%	77.1
Head goals per 90	0.17	65.7

Passing metrics

	Per 90	Percentage
Accurate forward passes, %	69.81%	88.50
Passes per 90	20.57	31.40
Accurate passes, %	75.42%	71.40
Passes to final third per 90	1.29	25.70
Passes to penalty area per 90	1.46	54.20
Progressive passes per 90	1.03	11.40
Smart passes per 90	0.26	14.20
Key passes per 90	0.51	60.00
Through passes per 90	0	2.80
Long passes per 90	0.09	5.70
Average pass length, m	13.04	8.50

Defending metrics

	Per 90	Percentage
Duels per 90	23.91	31.40
Duels won, %	36.56%	45.70
Aerial duels per 90	3.69	71.40
Aerial duels won, %	51.16%	93.70
Defensive duels per 90	4.11	28.50
Defensive duels won, %	60.42%	28.50
PAdj Interceptions	2.2	17.10
PAdj Sliding tackles	0	2.80
Shots blocked per 90	0	2.80
Fouls per 90	0.69	25.70
Fouls suffered per 90	0.51	5.70

Ada Hegerberg is predicted to be the team's best and most impactful player for Norway in this tournament based on their excellent attacking skills and her impressive mentality. It is true that the player is just coming back from a long injury and has not been selected to play for Norway for a long time. However, she proved as soon as she came back to the field at Lyon

that she still has got what it takes to bounce back and impose herself both at Lyon and at her national team. Everyone saw her impressive performance in the UEFA Women's Champions League final against a giant like Barcelona and that just proves how Hegerberg's strong character enables her to play specially and be extremely impactful, especially during such tough and decisive games.

As the above graphic breaking down her domestic performances for the last calendar year shows, Hegerberg's attacking statistics are excellent — whether it is her finishing skills, her xG, her shooting averages or her touches inside the box, Hegerberg masters all these aspects and executes her actions with great determination and "complicated simplicity". This means that her decision-making is quick and intelligent at the same time and appears very obvious to viewers. However, it takes a lot of experience, skills and intelligence to be quick and still make fruitful footballing decisions with and without the ball.

That's exactly why Norway should use this player's abilities to score as many goals as possible and work on specific playing systems and plans to put Hegerberg in the best-suited positions for scoring. Norway's coaching staff will not have to think too much about ways to serve a player like Hegerberg as she often moves a lot without the ball and as you can see in the graphic, her aerial duels' rate is excellent. Therefore, relying on early crosses could be beneficial when having a player like Hegerberg inside the box, in addition to other attacking plans.

TOURNAMENT PREDICTION

Norway has got what it takes to reach the quarter-finals. Also, they are capable of winning Group A if they succeed in beating England in the second group stage match, although that will not be easy. Nevertheless, Norway has a team which can battle with England for the top of the group, even though the hosts are the favourites to finish first. If things go as expected, Norway will finish second in the group and face the winner of Group B, who will more likely be Spain, as they have an advantage over Germany.

To conclude, Norway's chances of reaching the semi-finals will be higher if they finish at the top of Group A and face Germany in the quarter-finals, knowing that Germany and Norway are quite similar in terms of players' quality. However, if Norway finish second, they will more likely encounter Spain in the quarter-finals and against such a team, Norway's qualification chances will not be so high, unless they produce a big surprise and beat Spain.

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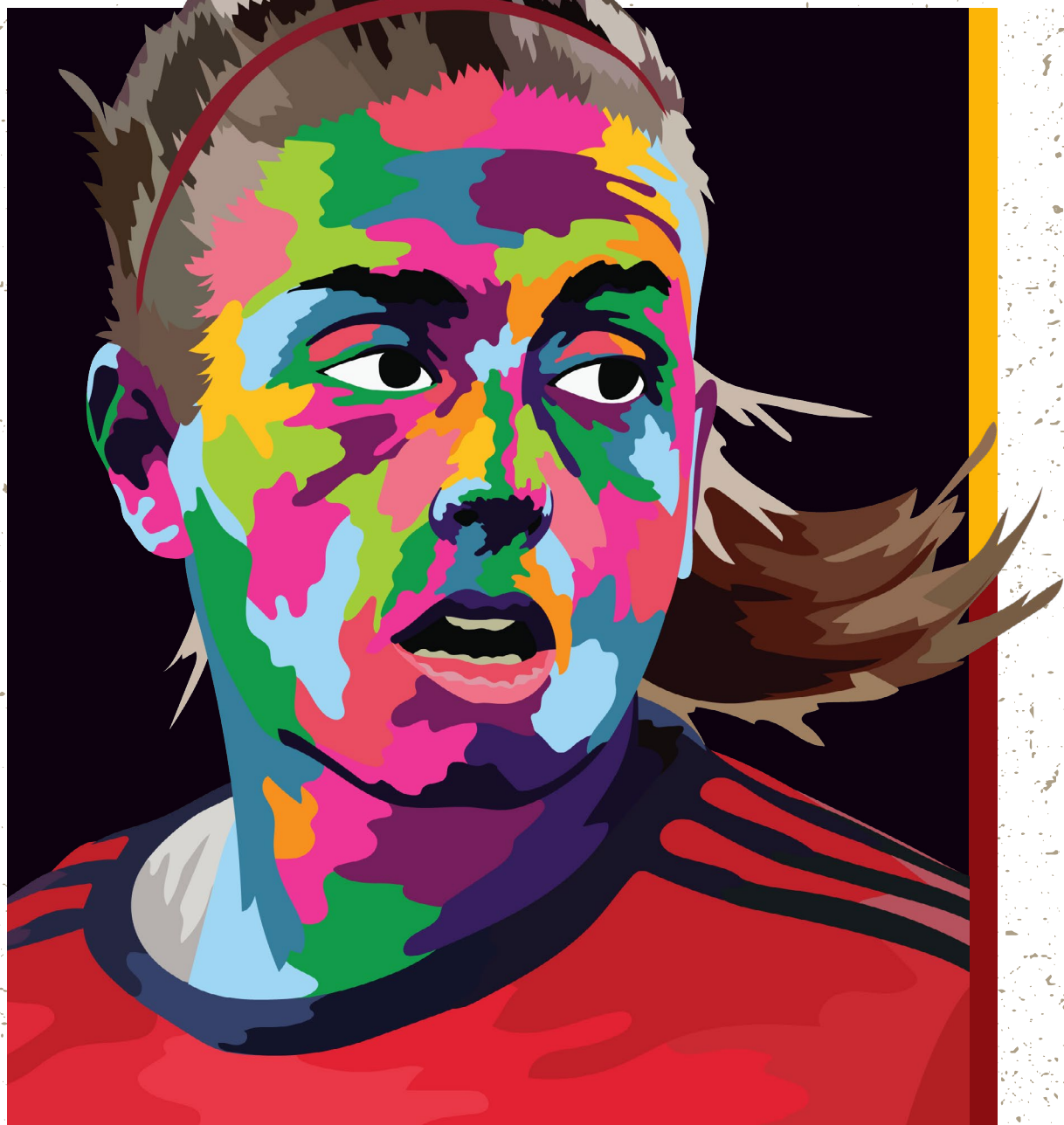| VIRTUAL SCOUTING TEAMS	TACTICAL AND TECHNICAL ANALYSIS
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ALEXIA PUTELLAS:

SPAIN

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DATA ANALYSIS

Alexia Putellas is one of the greatest female footballers on Planet Earth right now and will be looking to showcase her prominence in the Women's European Championships with Spain this summer.

Putellas possesses immense quality. She glides around the football pitch looking unscathed, untouchable, drifting through games, stamping her mark with a non-present presence. One minute she is picking up the ball over on the left on the half-turn, the next she is dropping deep to provide the centre-backs with forward passing options.

Marking the 28-year-old seems redundant. If you do, she will isolate you and kill you with her quality. If you deny her space in one area, Putellas will find it elsewhere. Stopping the Barcelona Femení icon is certainly not impossible, but if Putellas is on form, the best way to stifle her is by saying a prayer.

The current winner of the UEFA Women's Player of the Year Award, Ballon d'Or Féminin, and The Best FIFA Women's Player, Putellas will want to prove why she's the best in the world, as she always does.

This tactical analysis piece will be a scout report of the incredibly talented midfielder. It will be an analysis of the Spaniard's strengths and weaknesses, as well as looking at how she fits into Spain's tactics for the upcoming Euros.

Attacking metrics	Per 90	Percentage
Non-penalty goals per 90	0.65	97.3
xG per 90	0.63	98.7
Touches in box per 90	5.26	97.3
Shots per 90	3.91	98.7
Shots on target, %	42.31%	77.7
Assists per 90	0.80	98.7
Offensive duels per 90	14.28	96.2
Offensive duels won, %	42.19%	76.5
Dribbles per 90	6.36	96.2
Successful dribbles, %	55.91%	62.9
Head goals per 90	0.10	90.3

Passing metrics	Per 90	Percentage
Accurate forward passes, %	78.95%	96.30
Passes per 90	64.34	95.00
Accurate passes, %	84.89%	90.00
Passes to final third per 90	10.07	91.30
Passes to penalty area per 90	6.71	98.70
Progressive passes per 90	10.12	93.80
Smart passes per 90	3.01	98.70
Key passes per 90	2.26	98.70
Through passes per 90	3.26	98.20
Long passes per 90	3.41	39.50
Average pass length, m	16.17	23.40

Defending metrics	Per 90	Percentage
Duels per 90	25.11	83.90
Duels won, %	49.30%	61.70
Aerial duels per 90	2.36	59.20
Aerial duels won, %	59.57%	87.60
Defensive duels per 90	5.31	37.00
Defensive duels won, %	58.49%	51.80
PAdj Interceptions	4.48	32.00
PAdj Sliding tackles	0.27	34.50
Shots blocked per 90	0	1.20
Fouls per 90	0.95	55.50
Fouls suffered per 90	1.5	87.60

This overall data profile of Putellas compared to the rest of the players in Europe makes for a truly terrifying reading for Spain's opponents.

She is in the upper percentiles of almost all attacking metrics and passing metrics. Putellas even ranks above average in most of the defensive metrics too, making her an all-around incredible footballer.

The one statistic that sticks out is that the Spaniard is in the 97th percentile for non-penalty goals scored per 90 which is genuinely unfathomable for a midfielder in the modern game. She is also in the 98th percentile for xG per 90, shots per 90 and assists per 90. One would be mistaken for believing that Putellas is a centre-forward.
Now that we've established, without any doubt, that Putellas is simply sensational, let's take a look at the data behind the positions she occupies on the pitch.

Spain, under Jorge Vilda, and Barcelona, under the guidance of Jonatan Giráldez, play a very similar brand of football. With that, the formation is relatively the same too.

Barca prefer to use a 4-3-3 which drops into a 4-1-4-1 and have used this system in 84% of their games this year. Likewise, Spain have used the 4-3-3/4-1-4-1 in 64% of their matches over the last calendar year in all competitions, although

they certainly haven't been averse to setting up in a back-three formation when they feel it'd be more beneficial for them.

Within these structures, Putellas plays predominantly as a left central midfielder across both Barcelona and Spain and has done so in exactly 84% of her matches this season.
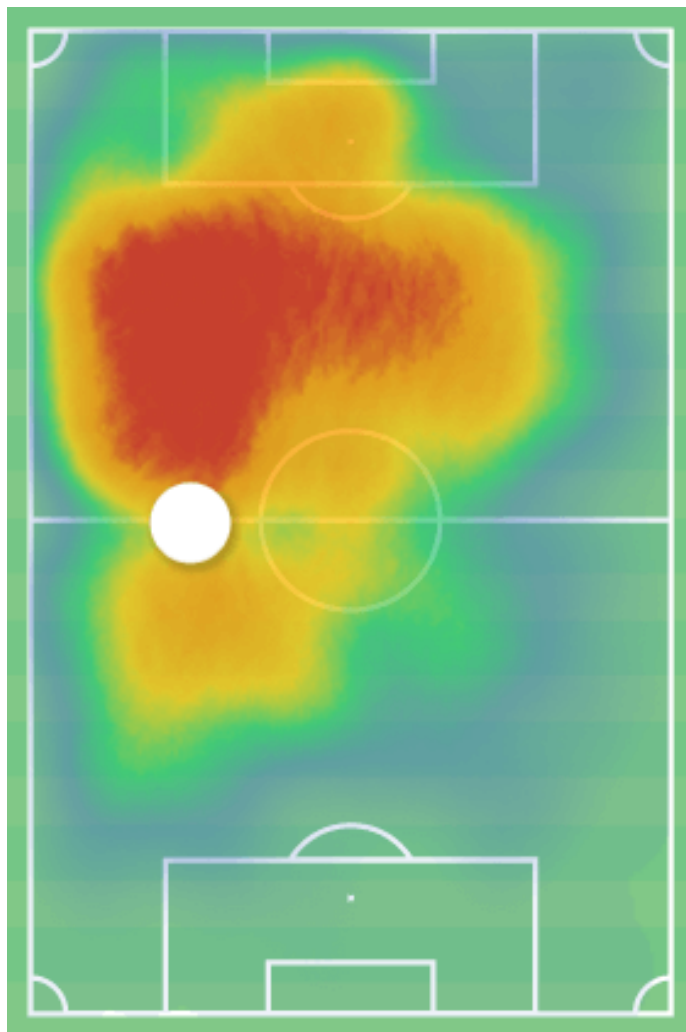
Of course, positions have become a meaningless conversation in modern football discourse. They are merely a simplistic way to quantify someone's location within the choice of formation. Player roles are a far better way to understand the type of player somebody is.

From the first heatmap, Putellas plays much more in the opponent's half of the pitch than her own, particularly pushing up into the pockets of space between the lines and in the half-spaces where she can cause serious damage.

The first heatmap portrays Putellas' positioning for both club and country. However, the following visual focuses solely on her role with the Spanish national team.
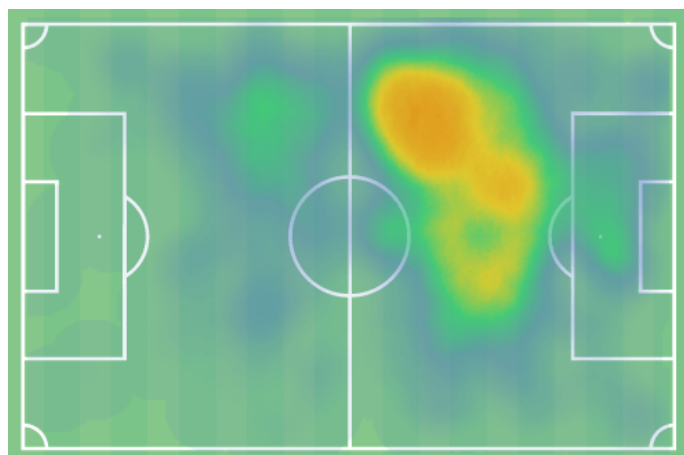
The similarities are very obvious but the main difference between the two is that Putellas does not drop as deep for the Spanish national side, mainly because Vilda prefers using the superstar in a solo number '10' role from time to time in certain formations.

PHYSICAL PROFILE

At 5'8 and 147lbs, Putellas is relatively tall and is certainly not easy to bully off the ball. She has a very strong core, allowing her to hold off defenders who are trying to nick the ball away. Nevertheless, her physical stature doesn't make her awkward on the ball and the 28-year-old has incredible control with a cultured left peg.

Putellas is as press-resistant as they come and so having her operate in the higher areas of the pitch, especially when her side have progressed to the final third, is a wonderful way to create goalscoring opportunities.

The Spaniard can also drop deeper though, during certain phases. Again, her press-resistance is key here, comparable in the men's game to a player like Real Madrid legend Luka Modrić. Putellas can also be compared to Modrić because of her match engine. Her ability to cover

ATTACKING PHASES

During the build-up phase, Putellas tends to remain behind the opposition's second line, in a much higher position than the other midfielders in the side.
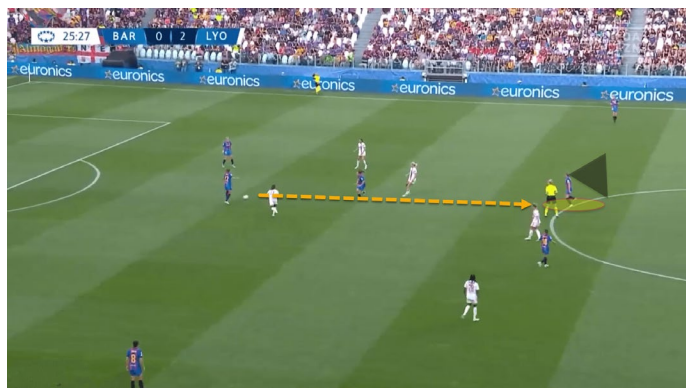
This is important because the midfielder can use her strengths optimally. Being a highly-technical player, Putellas excels at receiving the ball in space, turning and driving forward, allowing her side to create micro-transitions in the process.

What is a micro-transition, one might ask? For those who may be unfamiliar with the concept, these are moments in the game where a team are in a settled positional attack and manage to progress the play into an area where they can quickly up the tempo and go forward with intense speed.

Putellas' movement behind the opponent's second pressing line helps to facilitate this.

Here, Putellas did what she does best and received the ball behind Scotland's second line on the half-turn, creating a micro-transition. Spain's centre-forwards and wingbacks are aware of her quality in these situations and have already begun their runs in behind the Scottish defence, hoping for a through ball into space.

At times, during the lower phases of play, Putellas will interchange positions with a deeper midfielder, allowing her to act as a passing option for the backline to circulate the ball, looking to break through the opposition's press.
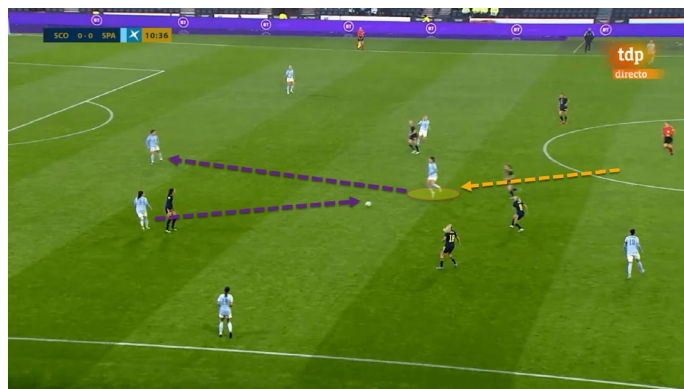
In this example, the Ballon d'Or winner dropped into the pivot space to receive the ball from Spain's defenders. Acting as a wall pass, Putellas simply bounced it back to base to help the team move the ball around.

She is constantly available to receive all over the pitch, staying high, low, wide and narrow depending on the space available. On average, over the course of the 2021/22 campaign, Putellas was receiving the ball 50.92 times per 90, while making 63.7 passes per 90 with an accuracy of 83.7%.

Nevertheless, while getting herself involved in the play in deeper areas of the pitch, Putellas is very much a creator in the final third as opposed to a deep-lying playmaker. This means that Putellas does not sit under the ball, instead positioning herself between the lines ahead of the play, looking to receive.
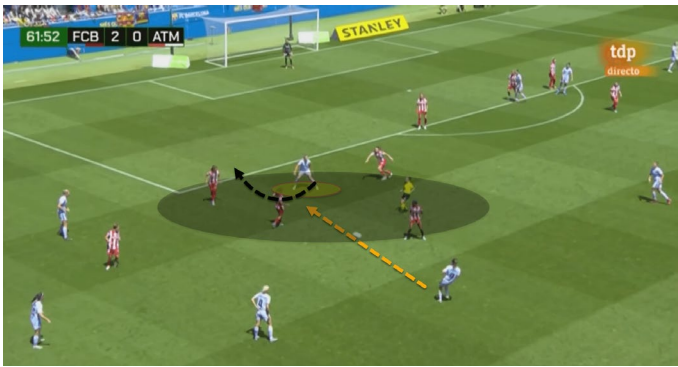
Putellas can be utterly deadly in this left half-space pocket, receiving the ball between the fullback/wingback and the nearest central defender.

Her ability to receive the ball on both her left and right foot before taking the ball on the half-turn is an integral part of the midfielder's star quality and could be vital for Spain to break down teams that sit in deeper defensive blocks.

Taking the ball on the half-turn in these narrow pockets without losing it is one of the most difficult tasks in football. The player must have insane quality and rapid reactions. Putellas has both of these elements and could be the key for Spain to unlock tight defences.

Her expected assists per 90 have been relatively high too at 0.32. Putellas slightly overperforms on this metric in reality, making 0.38 assists per 90.

However, not only is she a wonderful creator in and around the box, Putellas is very dangerous in the final third too. She constantly makes dangerous runs in behind to stretch the opposition vertically, while also hoping to receive the ball.
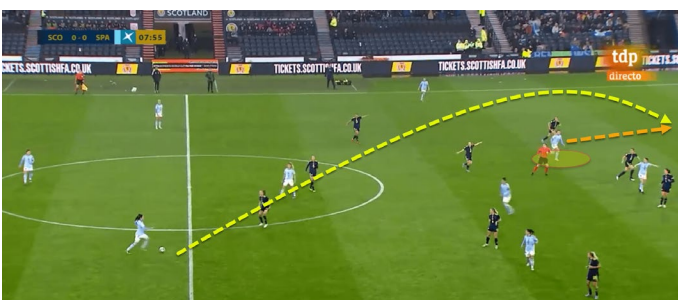
Putellas can also operate as a bit of a fox in the box too at times. Given that she plays over

on the left for Spain and Barcelona, once the ball is out wide on the right, Putellas positions herself at the back-post, looking to make herself available for a cross.

With her relatively tall frame, Spain can utilise her height and wonderful movement in the penalty area to their advantage to create goalscoring opportunities. It was this type of scenario that led to Barcelona's only goal in the UEFA Women's Champions League final.
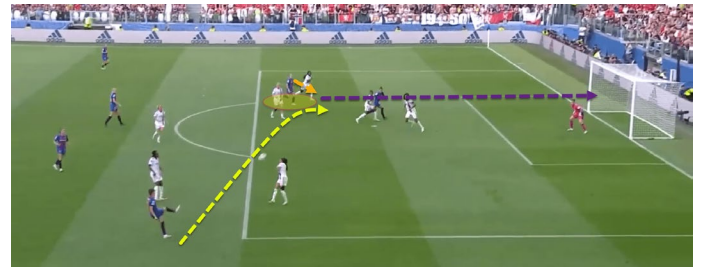
Inside the penalty area, Putellas is incredibly dangerous. Being a midfielder, the Spaniard does take shots outside the area. However, the sheer volume of shots she takes inside the box is really impressive.

Looking at Putellas' last 75 shots in all competitions for club and country, it is clear that the world's best player is incredibly potent in front of goal.
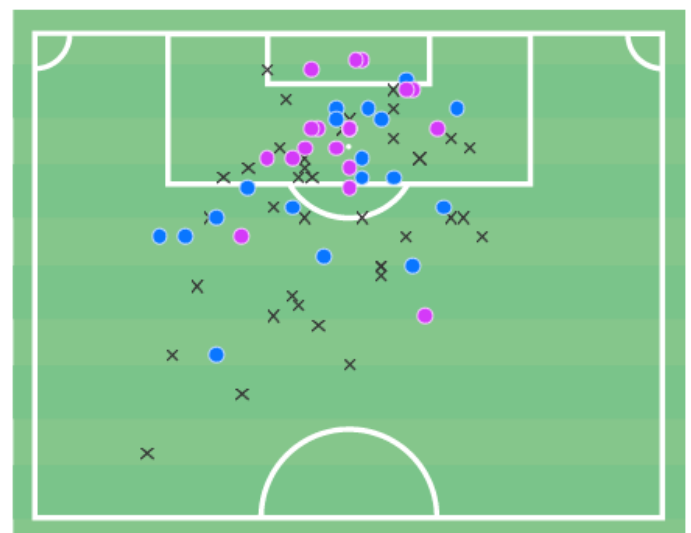
● Goal ● On target ✕ Miss

Showing last 75 shots, excluding penalties

Putellas has averaged 0.88 goals per 90 this season with an xG of 0.62 per 90 — truly scintillating statistics.

DEFENSIVE PHASES

While being an expert on the offence, Putellas is not a slacker defensively. Many world-class stars across both the men's and women's game are incredible on the ball but are relatively lazy getting down and dirty when helping their teams out of possession; Putellas is certainly not one of these.

Given Spain like to press high and try to win the ball back high up the pitch. Putellas is a decent presser and will be very useful for La Roja this summer during the high press.

Typically for Spain and Barcelona, Putellas is tasked with pushing up to mark the opposition's deepest pivot player during the high block phase.

To be trusted with this role, a player needs to be solid in their defensive duels, which Putellas definitely is, competing in 5.22 defensive duels per 90 this season, winning 60.5% of them.

More impressively, Putellas averaged 6.08 ball recoveries per 90 over the past season with 75.8% being in the opponent's half of the pitch. Furthermore, the Spanish playmaker is making 2.08 interceptions per 90 as well.

For Spain alone, these numbers are even higher. Putellas competes in 5.74 defensive duels per 90, winning 61.7% of them. Meanwhile, the Spaniard has averaged 7.17 recoveries per 90

over the past calendar year for her country, with 72% being in the opponent's half.

One of the major weaknesses in Putellas' game, though, which will be a concern for Vilda for the upcoming European Championships, is her tendency to foul players.

Putellas doesn't like when an opposition player shields the ball from her as she is attempting to nick it back. When situations like this occur, the midfielder has a rather irrational, yet endearing tendency to pull the ball-carrier to the floor in frustration.

The 28-year-old has given away 0.88 fouls per 90 this season, almost one foul per match.

TRANSITIONS

As effective as Putellas can be on the ball and even off of it with her exceptional movement as well as her defensive nous, she is also an extremely useful asset in transition for Spain and Barcelona.

We spoke earlier about her ability to be very dangerous from micro-transitions during structured attacks, but the Ballon d'Or winner is just as good in an actual transition, more commonly known as a counterattack.

Putellas is a wonderful carrier of the ball and has a keen eye for a pinpoint through ball, so when the Spaniard gets into a position where she can drive at the opposition's backline, her teammates

make darting runs in behind, expecting the slipped pass.
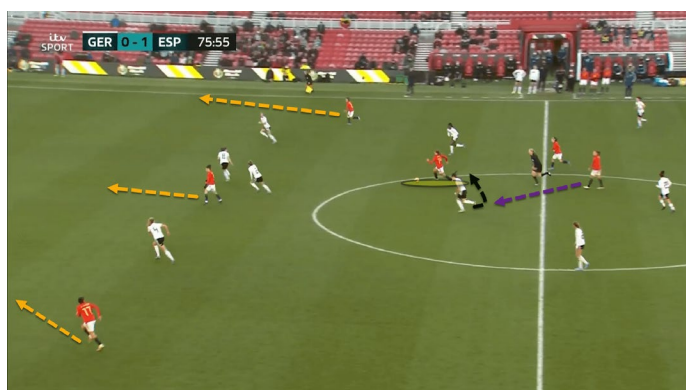
Defenders drop off when Putellas gets into these types of situations. They understand the creative prowess she possesses and the damage that the midfielder can do.

In all competitions this season, Putellas has attempted 6.16 dribbles per 90 from the middle of the park. She has completed 51.7% of these dribbles. In total, Putellas has also averaged 1.5 progressive runs per 90 and 2.57 through balls with an accuracy of 46.9%.

Defensively, again being no slouch, Putellas gets involved in her team's defensive transitions, especially in the higher areas of the pitch. Once again, her 7.17 ball recoveries per 90 for Spain over the past calendar year and 72% being in the opponent's half prove her capabilities in this phase of play.

Spain are very aggressive in their pressing and closing down. The women's national team boasted a PPDA of 4.7 during the Euros qualifying campaign, which was the third-lowest of all of the teams that partook.

Furthermore, Vilda's girls held the highest challenge intensity of the qualifiers with 9.5, equal to Belarus at the summit of the rankings.

Laziness is not an option, and thankfully, Putellas is certainly not lazy, always looking to help her teammates counterpress to regain possession of the ball as soon as it's lost, such as in the previous image.

CONCLUSION

Spain are definitely one of the favourites to win the tournament outright and with Putellas in their team, anything is possible. La Roja are not a one-woman team, but they will undoubtedly be leaning heavily on the midfield superstar.

A master on the ball, and perceptive off of it, Putellas will be primed and ready to take England by storm on the international stage this summer. The magician is one of Total Football Analysis' key players to watch during the European Championship this time around and if you can't watch many games throughout the competition, try and make time to watch Spain in action. Putellas will have you on the edge of your seat.

DENMARK:
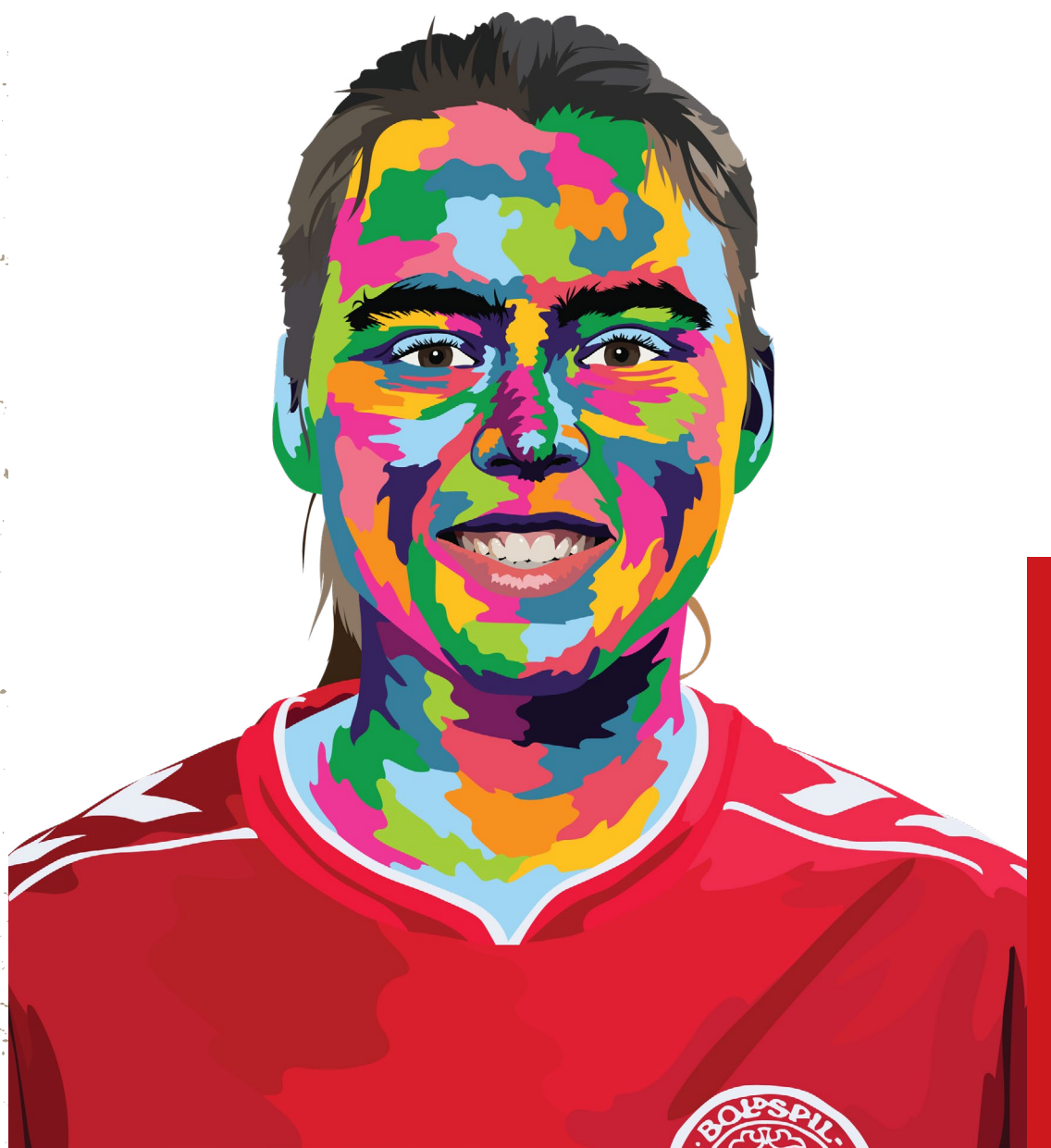
GROUP B

DAVID ASTILL // @DavidPAstill21

The Women's World Cup in 2019 drew a huge amount of interest and was instrumental in increasing exposure of the women's game to the wider world. Now, three years later, international women's football once again takes centre stage, with the UEFA Euro 2022 finals in England promising to be an occasion to remember.

One of the teams competing in the finals tournament are Denmark, a side rich in talent who have regularly been ranked among the top nations in women's football and currently hold 15th place in the world rankings. They have significant experience of major tournaments in the past, having been to four World Cups and ten Euro tournaments (including this one), and were the runners-up in the 2017 final, eventually losing out to hosts the Netherlands. They are no strangers to the top table.

However, in their group this time, they will face Finland, Germany and Spain, none of whom represent easy opposition. Spain are expected by many to top the group, but Germany and Denmark will most likely fight to finish second and join them in the tournament's latter stages, whilst Finland are seen as the group's underdogs and won't be expected to progress. Given their tournament pedigree and squad quality, it is certain that the Danish side will attract plenty of focus from fans, who will be eager to see if they meet expectations or if they end up falling short.

PREDICTED STARTING XI
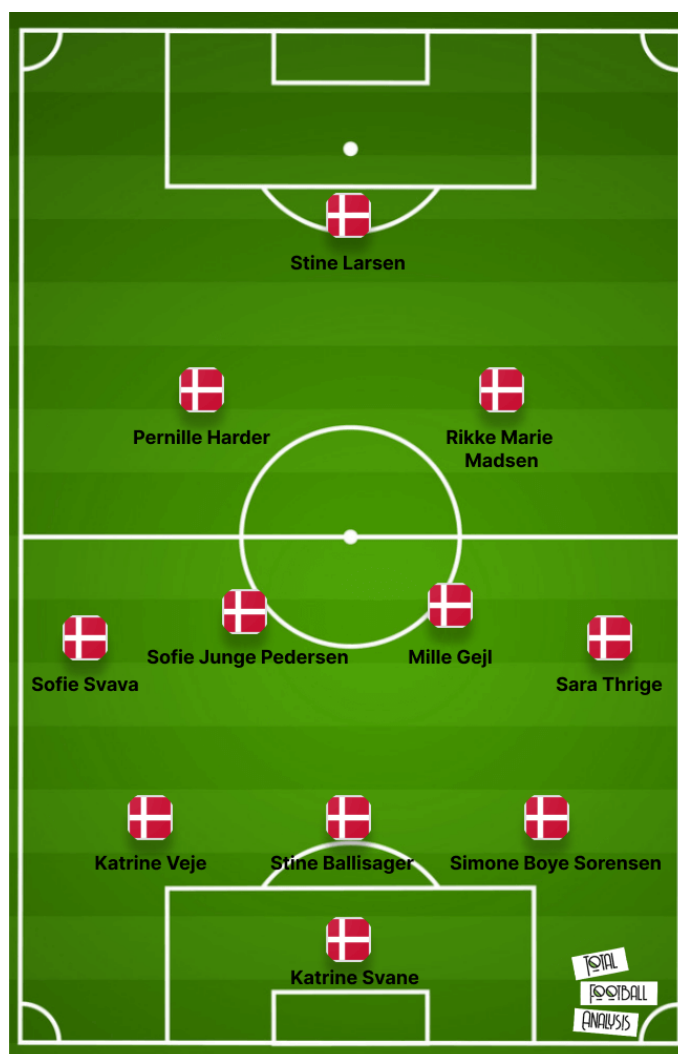
Denmark tend to favour a 3-4-2-1 setup during matches, with three strong defenders who are also capable of playing out from the back, wing-backs who can get up the pitch and create width for the team, midfielders who have a good level of energy and contribute in both offensive and defensive situations, and three forwards who can work together to keep attacks alive and then shoot at goal when the moment comes.

Katrine Svane will likely be their first-choice goalkeeper, with her closest competitor Lene Christensen included in the squad but still recovering from an injury sustained in the Algarve Cup back in February, so she may not be deemed fit to start their group games. The back

three has been made up in more games than not during 2022 by Arsenal Women's Simone Boye Sørensen, who is calm under pressure and capable of finding teammates in key areas ahead of her, Stine Ballisager, a reliable player that the team can fall back on if space becomes limited ahead of them, and Katrine Veje, who plays for Swedish giants Rosengård and, like Boye Sørensen, adds composure and quality to their back line.

The wing-back roles are not as settled, with several options available and Denmark coach Lars Søndergaard trying different players in the wide channels so far this year. However, the left is more certain, with Real Madrid Femenino's Sofia Svava capable of playing as a winger or a left-back and therefore fitting the role perfectly. Meanwhile, the best option on the right, given her natural tendency to get into forward areas, is Milan Femmenile's Sara Thrige Andersen, as her pace and crossing ability will be vital in their transitional play and ability to carry a presence in the final third.

Between those two players, there are again several combinations that could be used. However, given the need for players who are agile, spatially aware and always switched on, Mille Gejl and Sofie Junge Pedersen, of BK Häcken and Juventus Femmenile respectively, seem the most likely to start. Junge Pedersen has shown herself this season to be a reliable defensive player in Serie A Femmenile, helping the Italian champions to control matches from deeper positions, whilst Gejl is an all-rounder who has been seen linking up play and making runs into advanced areas of the field to support attacks, so would balance the midfield out.

The three forward positions are again debatable, with different ways for Denmark to create the perfect blend of ball control and goal threat. Chelsea Women star Pernille Harder has been injured for much of the last season, but there is a wide expectation that she will feature in one of the two supporting roles if fit enough to start. Alongside her, with Real Madrid Femenino's Caroline Møller left out, Madrid CFF Femenino's Rikke Marie Madsen looks most likely to be in the XI, helping Denmark to unlock defences when needed, whilst Stine Larsen is most likely to be named as their central striker. Larsen has become Häcken's first-choice striker since joining the team from Aston Villa Women last summer and Denmark rarely go into a game without her.
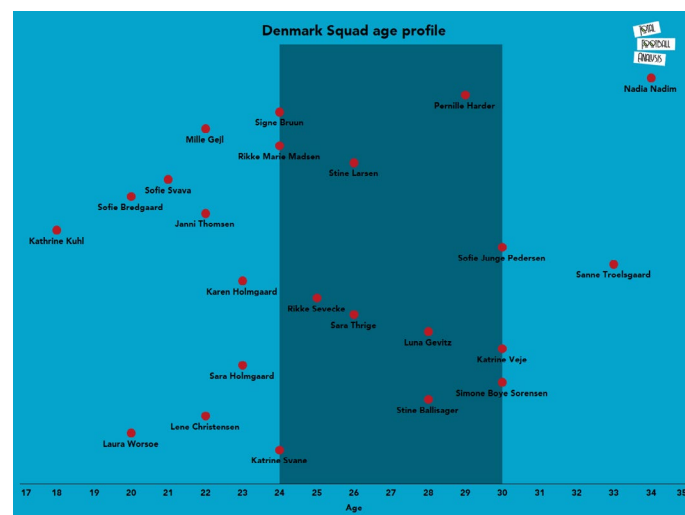
This graphic shows the spread of ages between those included in Denmark's final squad for the tournament, separating the 23 players into youth (aged 24 and under), peak (24 to 30) and experienced (30 and over).

As can be seen, Denmark have generally favoured a more youthful approach to their squad selections, with the majority of players either in the youth or early peak categories, and this is likely because players in these age ranges have extra pace and raw ability, particularly in the middle of the pitch, which suits their creative free-flowing style of football.

However, in defence, they rely more on experience, with players who have been around the international team for longer likely to be included in the back three. This is perhaps to ensure that there is a tried and tested last line of defence and they have the ability to work together when required to end threats, providing

defensive solidity and allowing those further forward to focus purely on what is ahead of them, which again leads to their positive attacking play.

ATTACKING PHASE
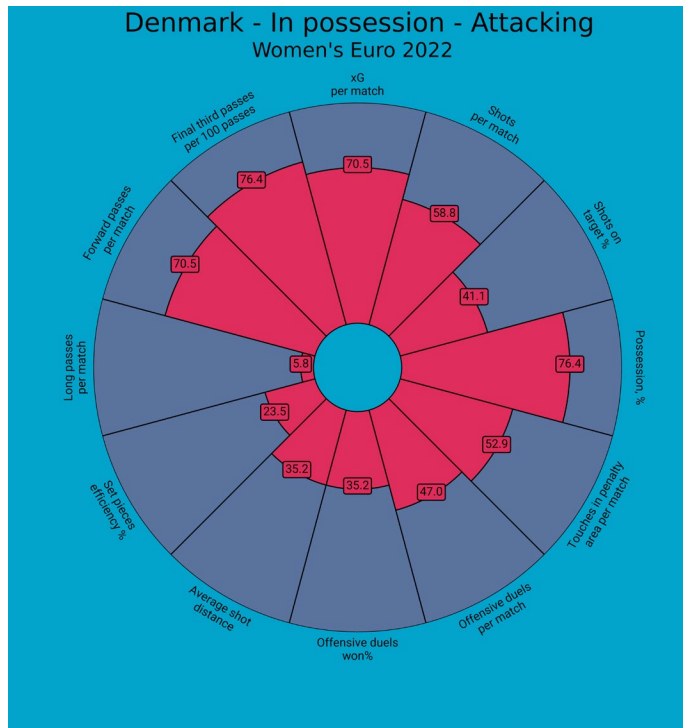
It's evident from this graphic that Denmark play an attacking style of football that enables them to control games, as proven by their high percentile ranking in possession. This is a positive of their 3-4-2-1 system, as the structure allows each player to constantly have two or three options in different areas whenever they receive the ball, meaning that they can keep it moving and rarely give it away cheaply.

Due to their ability to control the flow of matches, it is unsurprising that they also make plenty of forward passes and passes into the final third, constantly looking to progress attacks and keep the pressure on their opponents. Moving the ball closer to their opponents' goal and then making intelligent shot selection are the reasons why their average shot distance is much lower than other teams, and we can expect that they will not score many goals from long distance during the upcoming finals.

We have already mentioned in this tactical analysis that Denmark's wing-backs play a key role in offensive situations, with their ability to hold the width shown in this situation against Azerbaijan. Both Sara Thrige and Sofie Svava have pushed up the pitch here, which means that the central midfielders and forward trio can work more closely to each other because none of them need to be concerned about the wings being left open. As a result, they can outnumber their opponents more easily, giving them a better chance of converting their opportunities when they opt to shoot.

The wing-backs are not only wide players, though, and are often seen drifting inside when Denmark get the ball into the goal area, often swapping positions with a teammate initially inside the pitch to become fully involved in the attack. With this in place, it is not surprising that Thrige has scored two goals and assisted three others for her country over the last year, whilst Svava has scored one and assisted eight.
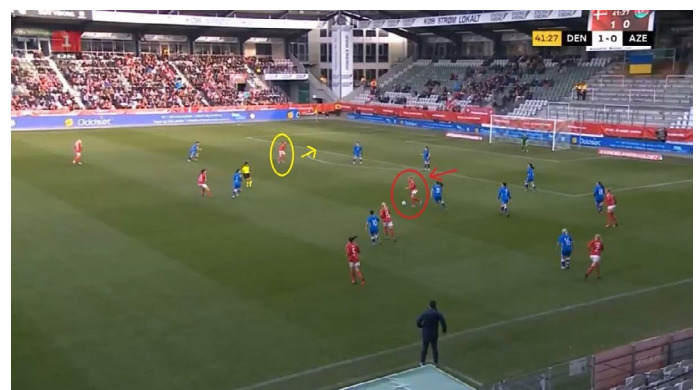
The flexibility that comes from players having freedom to move around the pitch also comes to light when looking at their midfield, with each player encouraged to find holes in and around their opponents and help to keep their play flowing, again ensuring that possession

is maintained. In this case, Stine Larsen has dropped back and now has possession outside of the box, whilst Mille Gejl, in the yellow circle, is moving forward to take her place as the main target player.

If we refer back to the graphic at the beginning of this section, it is shown that Denmark don't make many long passes per match; this is due to them always looking for shorter passes like the one into Larsen here because the risk of losing possession is lower and their opponents find it harder to make interceptions, which is something that Azerbaijan discovered in this game.

Therefore, in attack, Denmark are a clinical side who don't make many mistakes and have a clear game plan that will make them very tricky opponents.

DEFENSIVE PHASE
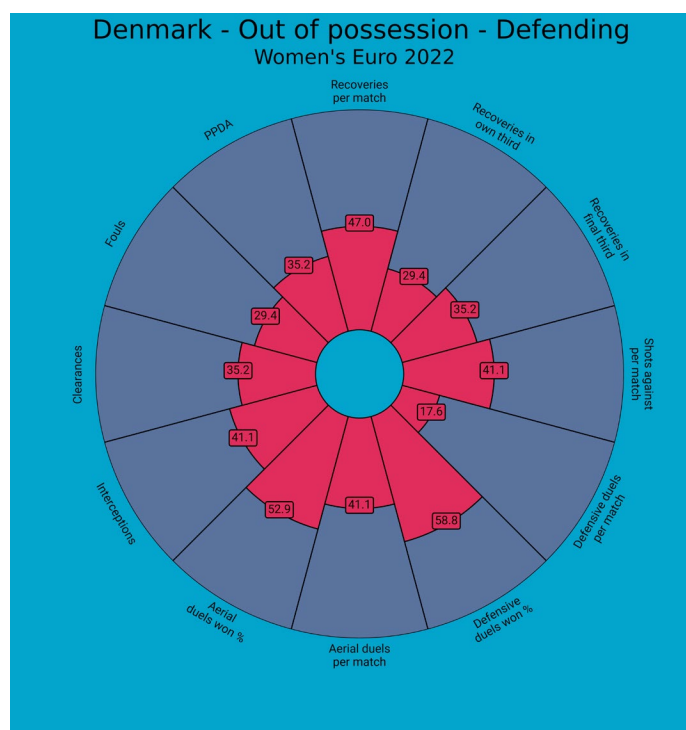
As a result of Denmark having numbers up the pitch, it is not surprising that they have a good ability to regain possession fairly rapidly once conceding it, with an average of 47 recoveries in their opponents' half per match

partially resulting from this. Compare that to the number of recoveries made in their own half and the point is clear — Denmark tend not to wait until their opponents have made territorial gains before looking to win back possession.

This is perhaps the reason for them not engaging in many defensive duels or aerial duels per game either, as indicated in the graphic. However, it should also be noted that the ones they do compete in, tend to be successful, which shows that they are strong when they need to be and always have something to fall back on if possession is not regained as quickly as normal. What this means for Spain, Germany and Finland is that they will need to be calm when they do win the ball, because even if they manage to evade Denmark's initial counterpress, the Danish players will not give up and allow them through.

That comes from their team structure when out of possession, which is organised and turns into a rough 4-3-3 shape. Italy are looking to move up the field here, but this pre-planned structure means that it is hard for them to make any ground passes and instead they are forced to play a long aerial pass, targeting the area behind the Danish defensive line and making it easier for Denmark to regain the ball and end the threat.

As well as removing options from Denmark's opponents, this setup also takes time away, as they can send players towards the ball in turn and force them to play the ball quicker, increasing the risk of a mistake being made. Going back to the graphic, opponents do manage to get a sizeable number of shots on Denmark's goal, but only 41.1% are actually on target, and this shape is a big reason for that.

The other key aspect of their defensive tactics concerns the midfielders and defenders working together when the ball does get higher up the pitch, with their focus at this point turning towards limiting their opponents' options in the middle. This is done by the back three becoming compact and protecting the goal whilst the two midfielders drop back to offer extra support and get tight to their teammates, leaving just a narrow corridor open for the central attacker to position themself in. Malta's target player here now doesn't pose a significant threat due to Denmark players working hard and helping each other out.

Therefore, as this section of the analysis has highlighted, Denmark once again have ways of adapting to win the ball back, and this is another reason why they will be tough to beat.

TRANSITIONS

This scout report has already noted that the back three play just as important a role as the wing-backs in enabling Denmark to create numerical overloads in the final third, and this image shows how far up the pitch the defenders tend to position themselves when the team is on the offensive. What is always visible is their teamwork and communication, ensuring that

they don't move too far away from each other and can become compact whenever the team lose the ball.

The advantage of having these three players this high up the pitch is that Denmark can make decisions in possession, not only in terms of which player to give the ball to but also whether to make a ground or aerial pass. We have already noted that they prefer to keep it on the ground, but having the ability to play through the air is also important as it demonstrates the team's adaptability and versatility.
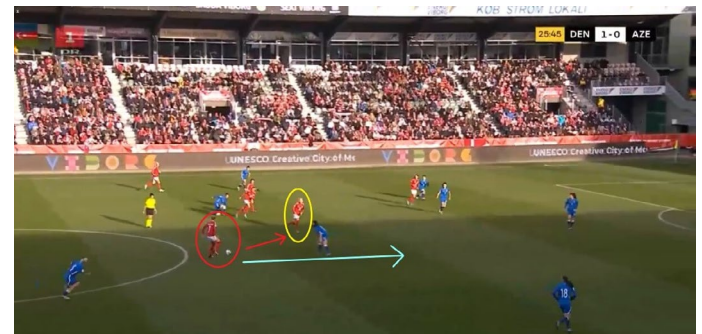
When the ball is played into the midfielders, they always want players to be available, as is a previously highlighted feature of their game plan. However, players never stand still once they have released the ball, with Reading Women's Sanne Troelsgaard passing into Kathrine Kühl here and then instantly moving forwards to offer a return option — this comes back to their spatial awareness and desire to keep moving into holes around the pitch.

Given that they make plenty of passes and wait for the right moment to shoot rather than simply trying their luck, some might describe their style of play as laboured and slow. Whilst this may be true, it is a system that has worked for them and is one that the players are clearly well-tuned in, so we can expect it to be prominent during their performances at Euro 2022.

FORWARDS

As mentioned, the key roles of the forwards are to receive the ball and provide an end product. However, shooting is not their strongest point, which is perhaps why they wait longer than might be expected and continue to pass the ball around before having a go at goal. In fact, the passing accuracies of the players most likely to feature in the supportive roles is very high, supporting this point, as Kathrine Kühl has an 80.7% accuracy, Rikke Marie Madsen has 73.3% and Signe Bruun 77.2%. Therefore, when it comes to those in the two advanced midfield positions, passing is generally the first thought rather than taking a shot at goal.

This is why Denmark tend not to be high scorers, and that is also shown by the percentage of shots from those same four players that were on target; Kühl only managing 50% of hers and Bruun 61.3%. Madsen has got 100% of her shots on target, but that is only down to her having three efforts in three games. Therefore, we should perhaps not expect Denmark to be involved in too many high-scoring encounters during the tournament, with their matches more likely to be won by tighter scorelines.

MIDFIELDERS

In midfield, we already know that Denmark's system depends on players passing well and helping to build attacks, and that is highlighted by the fact that Sanne Troelsgaard has an 81.5% passing accuracy, Sofie Junge Pedersen has 89.6% and Mille Gejl 72.3% (possibly due to her getting further forward than the other two during open play). However, when the ball is in the final third or travelling in that direction, they are actively encouraged to get forward and support the front three, although it is rare to see

them inside the penalty area, with Troelsgaard only touching the ball 2.76 times on average per game inside the box, whilst Junge Pedersen has only touched the ball 2.51 times in the goal area and Gejl is lower still, with just 2.34 touches. Therefore, anything they do offer tends to come from deeper positions and shots are taken from distance, meaning that they usually don't find the target.

The midfielders are also essential to their defensive play, with all three of those players thriving in different aspects. For Troelsgaard, she is better in open spaces, with 5.05 interceptions on average per game whilst just 37.5% of her defensive duels were successful, whilst Junge Pedersen makes fewer interceptions (an average of 3.98) but has won 76.6% of her defensive duels and Gejl makes fewer interceptions still, at just 2.34 per game, whilst winning 66.7% of her defensive duels. Therefore, they are not all good at the same thing and each has different strengths, which is why their midfield is so well-balanced both in attack and defence.

DEFENDERS

When it comes to the defenders, we already know that they need a good passing accuracy in order to fit into Denmark's tactics, and the fact that Simone Boye Sørensen has a 91% accuracy, Stine Ballisager has 95.2% and Katrine Veje 89.8% shows why they are arguably the first choices in their positions.

However, they also need to demonstrate a good passing range, as mentioned earlier in the scout report. The values this time for those players are understandably not as strong as their overall passing, because that tends to be across shorter distances and whilst keeping the ball on the ground. Nevertheless, Boye Sørensen's 74.1% accuracy of passes to the final third, Ballisager's 77.8% and Veje's 85.5% indicate that, yet again,

it is a quality they have, which is why they will likely start together during the majority of the tournament.

The wing-backs are the main targets for the centre-backs to pass to, so both Sara Thrige and Sofie Svava need to be adept at controlling the ball and then transferring it into the middle. The fact that Thrige's crossing accuracy is just 43.8%, whilst Svava's stands at 41.3%, shows that this isn't necessarily their biggest strength, although it is why they drift inside at times and get into areas where crosses are not required so much, so this again fits in with the points already raised in the tactical analysis.

BEST PLAYER

Player Name : P. Møsgaard Harder **Minutes played :** 1,258 **Weight :** 0 kg
Player Age : 29 **Market value :** €0 **Height :** 168 cm
Team Name : Chelsea **Contract** **On Loan :** No **Nationality :** Denmark
Position : AMF, LWF, CF

P. Møsgaard Harder

Attacking metrics	Per 90	Percentage
Non-penalty goals per 90	0.36	90.4
xG per 90	0.47	96.8
Touches in box per 90	6.15	96.8
Shots per 90	3.36	95.2
Shots on target, %	36.17%	66.6
Assists per 90	0.14	77.7
Offensive duels per 90	11.23	93.6
Offensive duels won, %	32.48%	31.7
Dribbles per 90	5.51	93.6
Successful dribbles, %	36.36%	19
Head goals per 90	0.14	96.8

Passing metrics	Per 90	Percentage
Accurate forward passes, %	66.94%	61.90
Passes per 90	25.9	22.20
Accurate passes, %	71.55%	22.20
Passes to final third per 90	3.51	23.80
Passes to penalty area per 90	3.86	93.00
Progressive passes per 90	4.84	41.20
Smart passes per 90	1.22	82.50
Key passes per 90	1.22	96.80
Through passes per 90	1.43	84.10
Long passes per 90	1.14	12.60
Average pass length, m	16.77	47.60

Defending metrics	Per 90	Percentage
Duels per 90	23.61	90.40
Duels won, %	43.64%	23.80
Aerial duels per 90	2.93	73.00
Aerial duels won, %	56.10%	74.60
Defensive duels per 90	5.51	34.90
Defensive duels won, %	46.23%	61.90
PAdj Interceptions	3.01	12.60
PAdj Sliding tackles	0.43	49.20
Shots blocked per 90	0.07	31.70
Fouls per 90	0.64	28.50
Fouls suffered per 90	1	74.60

When picking out a key player for Denmark, it is difficult to look past their talismanic attacker and the country's record goalscorer (men's and women's), Chelsea's Pernille Harder. As this graphic (breaking down her domestic performances for the last calendar year and comparing her statistics in each noted area with the league median) illustrates, the versatile forward ranks above the league median for the majority of attacking statistics, which is not surprising given that she is their focal point and target player, therefore having plenty of goalscoring opportunities.

However, there are a couple of statistics in which Harder is lower than the median — offensive duels won and successful dribbles. The reason for offensive duels being below the median is that in recent years, she has operated in the central role for her nation, so winning balls back has not been her primary role on the pitch. As she is in the final third more often than not, she also doesn't make many dribbles, with there not being much distance between her and the opposing goal, so this explains why that also doesn't rank as highly.

When passing, Harder's long ball ratio being lower is again due to Denmark's style of play, as the ball is played into her across shorter distances and her teammates are in close proximity to her, meaning that she then doesn't need to cover long distances to find them. However, the fact that her key passes per 90 are in the top band when compared to others in her position indicates how, when she does move the ball around the pitch, it tends to be effective and lead to something, which explains why she is such an important player and is her country's captain.

Defensively, Harder's role is not hugely focused on attempting interceptions or winning duels, which is why these values are lower than the league median. However, she does offer something in this section of the graphic with her aerial duels won ranking highly, and this shows how she is strong in the air and a good target player for her team. Having her at the top of the pitch will enable Denmark to play a more direct style of play if needed, again highlighting their adaptability and Harder's importance to that.

TOURNAMENT PREDICTION

Given the points made in this tactical analysis, we must conclude that Denmark are capable of competing in this tournament and in all likelihood will do so, but we also need

to remember that they are in a tough group with some very tricky opposition, which may dampen expectations slightly. Their hopes of progressing deep into the tournament won't be helped by the fitness questions of Pernille Harder, given her obvious importance to the team. However, in their three games so far in 2022, Harder has not been as involved in the squad, so Denmark have proven that they can play without her and still deliver good performances to gain results.

The concern will be that their wins came against 'weaker' opposition in Azerbaijan and Malta, but they lost to Italy in the Algarve Cup before being forced to withdraw from the tournament. Therefore, the question is: can they compete with those on the same playing level as them?

If they can find their attacking quality and control games, then Denmark have a very real chance of being competitive. How far they progress will depend on whether they can sustain that momentum, but fans should have hope that they will make it to the knockout rounds at the very least.

FINLAND:

GROUP B

JARED GUZENDA // @GuezendaSA

Finland have qualified for their first major tournament since the Sweden 2013 Euro finals. The 28th-ranked team in the world have a desire to reach another semi or quarter-final after failing to reach the knockout rounds of this competition since the 2009 edition.

Finland do not have lots of experience in major international tournaments, having never qualified for the World Cup and failing to qualify for the last Euro finals in 2017. The team will need to work together and not look for any individual brilliance to stand any chance of beating the other teams in the group.

However, Finland are not expected to progress in the tournament with the extremely high strength of the others in their group, the expectation is that they won't get out of the group. Germany and Spain are ranked fourth and seventh in the world, respectively, and are two of the favourites for the Euros with both teams regularly competing for major tournament wins. Along with these two powerhouses, 15th-ranked Denmark will also be looking for a deep run in the competition with a young and exciting squad at their disposal.

PREDICTED STARTING XI

Sanni Franssi   Ria Öling

Essi Sainio   Adelina Engman

Eveliina Summanen   Emmi Alanen

Emma Koivisto   Tuija Hyyrynen

Natalia Kuikka   Anna Westerlund

Tinja-Riikka Korpela

Finland have used a 4-4-2 formation in all of their World Cup qualifiers before this tournament, except for their most recent match against Georgia in which they changed the formation to a 3-4-1-2, while also using a highly changed starting XI for the contest.

Anna Signeul's team are comfortable and familiar with the 4-4-2 formation, making the system fluid and highly effective for working as a team and less as individuals. The high intensity of the team will force Finland to change players during the tournament or to make substitutions more frequently than the other teams in the group. Anna Signeul also has a starting XI that

she is confident in, with the players rarely being changed within the system.

One of the first names on the team sheet will be goalkeeper Tinja-Riika Korpela. The current first-team goalkeeper for Tottenham Hotspur and a two-time Bundesliga winner with Bayern Munich. Korpela has over 100 caps for the national team and is unlikely to not start, owing to her ability and experience in major tournaments. The two backup goalkeepers, Anna Tamminen and Katriina Talaslahti, do not have anywhere near the honours or experience of Korpela and will not be expecting to play during the tournament.

Finland's defence is the strongest aspect of their squad with experience and trophies in every position along the backline. The full-backs for Finland both play at a high level with Tuija Hyyrynen a highly successful player starting for multiple-time winners of Serie A — Juventus — at the age of 34. The defender is Finland's sixth-most capped player and will be looking to become the fourth-most capped player by the end of the tournament. Emma Koivisto, on the opposite side, starts for Brighton & Hove Albion in the WSL and will be looking to play in her first Euro tournament since playing in the WSL.

At centre-back, Finland also have lots of quality with Natalia Kuikka and Anna Westerlund forming the backbone of the Finnish national team. Westerlund has the record for the number of appearances for the Finland national team and will be hoping to have a great tournament as it may potentially be her last. Kuikka alongside her is a three-time winner of Finland's Player of the Year award at the age of 26. She currently plays for the NWSL side Portland Thorns and will be an important player for years to come with the national team.

Finland's midfield does not boast the accolades of the defence but has lots of players who suit the style of the team, with the ability to play at a high

intensity and cover lots of ground on the pitch. The position with the most rotation is the wide midfielders; in the starting XI Adelina Engman and Essi Sainio started the majority of matches in the World Cup qualifiers and are most likely to start in the Euro finals. Sainio is the oldest winger in the side with the ability to play at full-back, enabling Finland to change to the 3-4-1-2 seen in their most recent match. Engman is their ninth-highest goal scorer and poses a major attacking threat for the team. There is plenty of competition for places with Nora Heroum having played multiple seasons at the top leagues in Europe. She will be looking to get some game time under her belt as the squad is rotated during the tournament.

In the centre of the park, Emmi Alanen and Eveliina Summanen have been staples of the midfield and are solid players in those positions with the ability to play as box-to-box midfielders and hound the opposition for the duration of the match.

The forwards in the squad have lots of quality, with Sanni Franssi and Ria Öling most likely to start up front, but Linda Sällström will be keen to keep her spot in the starting XI as her national team's all-time top goalscorer. It is very difficult to predict who will start most of the matches but there is no doubt in our eyes that Sällström is going to start at least one game at the tournament. However, at the age of 33, the younger players will be able to keep up the high intensity necessary in the demanding playstyle for most of the tournament.

Finland Squad age profile
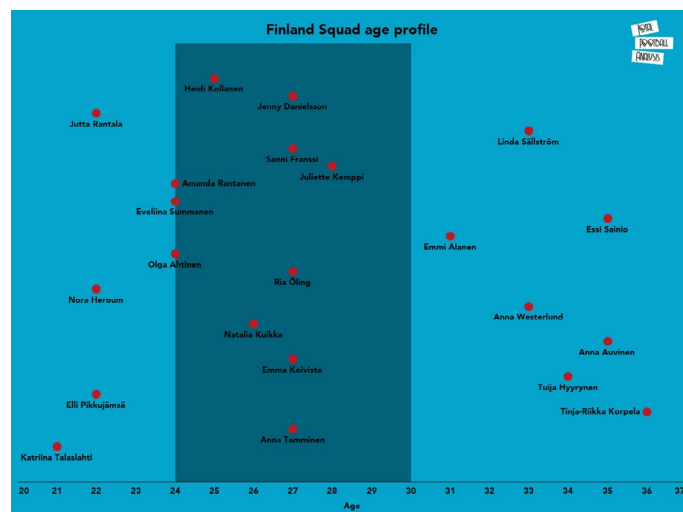
As seen from the graphic, the majority of Finland's team have reached their peak (24 to 30) or are beyond their peak which could be a valuable mix to have if they get the balance between experience and athleticism right, on the pitch. Experience is important for major tournaments such as the Euro finals where many players will be lacking the understanding of what it takes to succeed at these events.

The squad has a core of these more experienced players with Westerlund, Hyyrynen, Korpela, Sällström, and Sainio all having played for many years at the national level, and this experience will be required to guide this squad and give them the best chance of getting out of the group stage. Undoubtedly, the players at their peak are fundamental to the system Finland plays to maintain the high press.

Most likely, the players under their peak will not get game time, but the experience from these tournaments will be important for the future of the team.

ATTACKING PHASE

Finland - In possession - Attacking
Women's Euro 2022

Finland don't have a tonne of variety in their game plan and their attacking strategies,

regardless of whether they're up against stronger or weaker opponents, don't really change. Due to the high number of games played in this system, their playing style has become an intuitive part of the players' movement when in possession of the ball, often with perfectly timed runs onto passes in behind the opposition. This is clear from the graphic, showing their high frequency of passes into the final third.

The play often starts with the ball circulating around the defence with the ultimate aim of getting the full-backs on the ball. The full-backs will be on the touchline trying to utilise the full width of the pitch. This provides the central midfielders and central defenders with lots of space to move into to get on the ball or use the time to pick out a pass. The central midfielders are not frequently used to progress the ball but will look to switch the play and create passing options to move the ball on from the centre-back to the full-back.
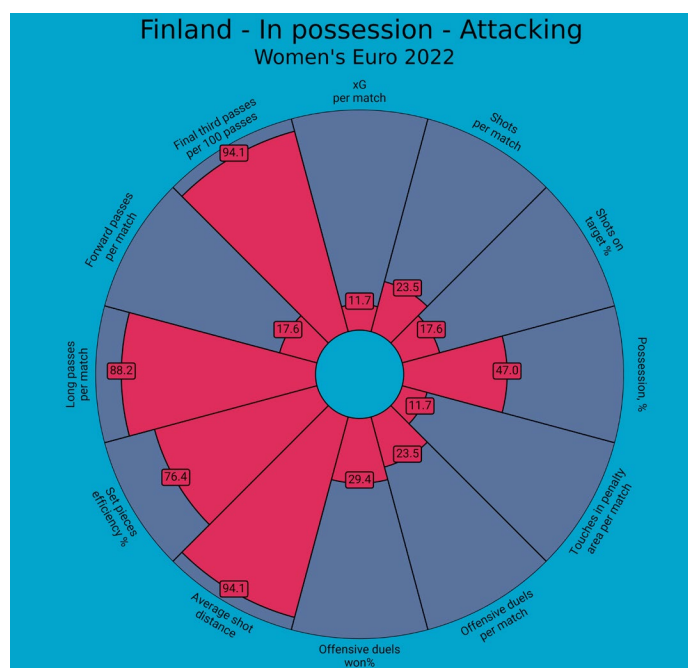
Finland aims to get the ball down the wide channel and in behind the opposition defence. These passes can come from the full-back or the centre-backs with a long ball that always goes to the same area of the pitch.

These long passes into the wide channels are received by the strikers or wide midfielders as the strikers look to work off each other in behind. Both strikers will look to go in behind and will very rarely show for the ball to feet.

From the wide channel, Finland look for crosses into the box, as lots of bodies flood forward often picking out a late run from a central midfielder onto the edge of the box.

This playstyle is very demanding, requiring high fitness to continually go from box to box and make runs in behind.

However, the high numbers of players they commit forward can make them weak against counter-attacks, especially if there is no quality in the final third with a poor pass or weak shot at the goalkeeper.
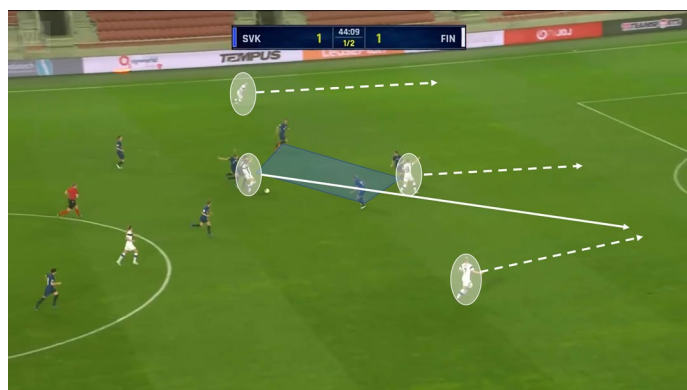
Finland don't just go down the wing — they will occasionally break through the midfield with their players possessing the ability to take on the opposition. Due to their width, they often enjoy lots of space to create numerically superior attacks in the final third.

Finland create a lot of chances in their matches but are usually lacking in quality to convert a high percentage of these opportunities into goals, with either the final ball or finishing ability coming up short.

DEFENSIVE PHASE
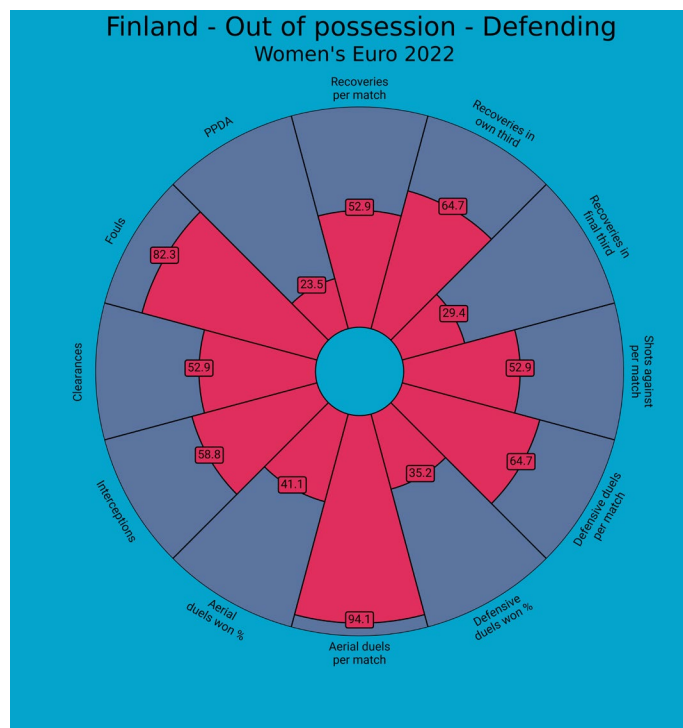
In defence, Finland use quite a demanding playstyle, as they're accustomed to a high-intensity press. This press is performed all over the pitch, as Finland are not afraid to send lots of players into a condensed space. This press has been highly successful for Finland, with their relatively low PPDA indicating that the opponent often loses the ball to Finland quite early on in their possession play while the Finnish team hunts for the ball aggressively, high up the pitch and close to the opposition's goal.

With the high density of players around the ball, their shape becomes very narrow, which can make them effective at winning second balls and forcing the opponents to make mistakes on the

ball. Even in their own defensive third, Finland will stick to this high press as they try to cut off any passing options to isolate the player on the ball, thus forcing a one vs one or two vs two.

Finland aim to win the ball as high up the field as they can to quickly create opportunities to score in transition while the opposition is in their attacking structure. No matter where the ball is on the pitch, all of the Finland attackers and midfielders are drawn to the ball making it difficult for the opposition to get a string of passes together.

When against stronger opponents, Finland have struggled to use this press effectively, with the opposition often displaying more comfort and composure on the ball, reducing the chance of a mistake and increasing their chances of playing past Finland's aggressive pressure to free players elsewhere on the pitch. Finland's defensive shape can become open and disorganised and alongside this disorganised shape, the narrowness of their press provides the opposition with a quick outlet in the wide channels for a simple way to bypass the Finland defence.
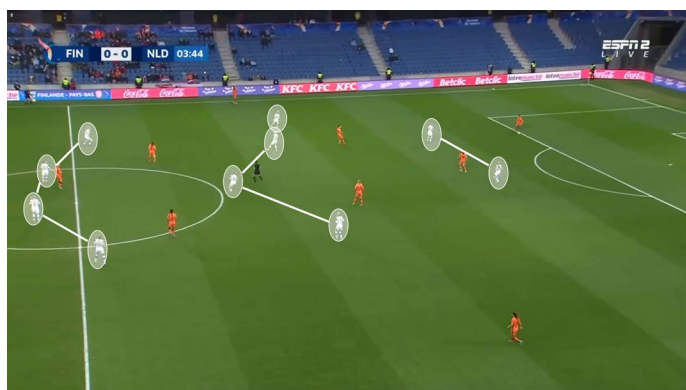
The Finnish shape is usually vertically stretched when they press in the opposition's half, with their strikers and midfield high and their defence sitting behind the halfway line due to their lack of pace. These spaces between the lines become problematic against teams with creative and skilful players who have good awareness to find a pass through the press.

For the duration of the tournament, Finland will struggle to keep up the intensity of their press, especially against opponents who look to keep possession and drag their shape around, though when they can press with lots of intensity, they are very effective. It will be interesting to see if they choose to stick with this 4-4-2 against all opponents or choose to change their style against different countries, so they can try to stay more defensively compact making it more difficult for the opponent to find an opening.

TRANSITIONS

A common theme with the Finnish game plan is numerical superiority and high intensity in every aspect of the game. In the defensive phase, there was a high press with a high density of players getting around the ball. In the attacking phase, it was all about getting players high up the field quickly to catch the opposition out. As with these two demanding phases, the transition between attack and defence is a weakness for this system.

When transitioning from attack to defence, Finland have struggled — especially following a counter-attack of their own. The root of this problem is that Finland tend to get lots of bodies forward, often being numerically superior. However, with so many players committed forward, Finland need to ensure that these chances have an end product and do not break down with a misplaced pass, interception or tackle as this could take a lot of players out of the game.
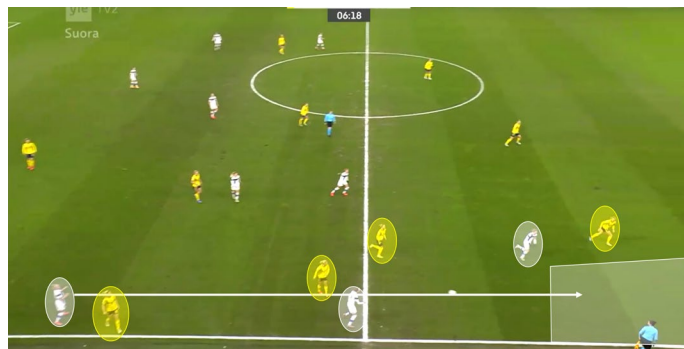
Besides their weakness in transition from attack to defence, they can be lethal in transition from defence to attack, thanks to their utilisation of the high press. This is how loads of Finland's chances are created, with them being most dangerous in a match when the opposition is chasing back to defend. In these situations, there is lots of open space and the fitness of the players becomes an important aspect, with it being taxing to chase back to defend.

Instantly after Finland win the ball, the focus moves to attacking the space and getting at the opposition defence, even if they are inside their half. With their strikers positioned high up the pitch, Finland always have a quick outlet to get the ball forward to turn the opposition. Once the opposition is chasing back, Finland look to get the ball in the space between the midfield and defence for players to be able to manufacture chances with the space and time from the attack.

Finland can catch out any team thanks to the fitness and speed of their players being above that of most teams at the tournament. With teams that are less comfortable on the ball or make lots of mistakes, Finland will punish them but against teams with the ability to pass, Finland may struggle. Players with the ability to exploit spaces and play pinpoint passes can cut through the transitioning shape of Finland —and many of the teams at the tournament will be able to do this. Also, teams with a compact structure can stop the majority of Finland's attacks as they are unable to overload a defence to free up players, often lacking the quality of the higher ranking teams at the tournament.

DEFENDERS

When it comes to defenders in the Finland squad, it is clear that the ability to play long balls is very important as this is one of the main passing options for the teams. The centre-backs have high averages for long balls per 90, with Westerlund playing 10.5, Kuikka 8.0 and Auvinen 7.1. With the three centre-backs most likely to start, they must also have enough quality to have the majority of possession go through the centre-backs, as the average number of passes per 90 and their accuracy for Auvinen was 33.5 with 84% accuracy, Kuikka 52 with 83% accuracy and Westerlund 53.5 with 84% accuracy.

Finland's full-backs are a major outlet with their width for creating opportunities and starting attacks. Making passes down the line into the final third is a quick way to get in behind, as highlighted by Hyyrynen making 6 per 90 and Koivisto 5 per 90. Along with these final third passes, these players are often looked to as being the way forward in the build-up with Hyyrynen playing 17.5 forward passes a match and Koivisto with 13.

MIDFIELDERS

The midfielders' main focus is on winning the ball back with a high press, especially when in the opposition half. Summanen tops the team with recoveries per 90 with 12.1, followed by Sainio with 10.7, Alanen with 8.6 and Engman

with 5.6. The average percentage of these in the opposition's half is 55% for the midfield, making Finland a pressing machine when it comes to winning the ball back in these areas. Anna Signeul's pressing style is highly important to her game plan and is most effective when she has a team of people looking to press and win the ball back as a group; this is why there is a spread of recoveries between the midfield as all of them have a high number of recoveries.

Chance creation is also important for any midfield as they are required to supply the strikers with shot opportunities. The midfielders are the bridge between attack and defence for the team, especially within the Finland team. They are important to support the strikers with late runs or getting in positions to score. All the midfielders get chances every match with Summanen having 1.3 shots, Sainio 1.1, Engman 1.5 and Alanen 1.13 per 90.

FORWARDS

In attack, the system demands the strikers to make a lot of forward runs throughout the match, even if they are not getting the ball as this will open up the opposition defence and open space between the midfield and defence. Once on the ball, dribbling is of major importance to keep progressing the ball but also for giving the midfielders time to catch up to the attack. This is where Sällström is lacking in her game and the reason behind her potentially not starting. Sällström averages 2.4 dribbles per match which is behind Öling with 4.4 and Franssi with 5.4 per match.

As a striker, though, it is not all about making runs but also their goalscoring ability. Sällström is undeniably the best goalscorer in the national team as she has the all-time record for goals scored and is the main scoring threat in the team. Sällström averages 0.64 goals per match

over 0.5 ahead of Öling with 0.12 and Franssi with 0.1. It will be difficult to choose the starting forwards from these options in the tournament, with Sällström having the goalscoring ability far beyond the other players, but not offering the ability to hound the ball continuously and make as many runs for the team. Bearing this in mind, using her as a substitute or starting her in just one or two of the group stage matches might be the best option.

BEST PERFORMER

Picking the best player was not difficult when looking at the number of Player of the Year trophies that Kuikka has won, with two consecutive awards for the 2020 and 2021 seasons — and three overall. As the graphic illustrates Kuikka is above average on 75% of the statistics, with the majority being in the passing metrics; this is not surprising considering the centre-backs' passing threat in the system.

This figure looks at her domestic performances for the last calendar year and compares her statistics in each noted area with the league median for her position. Starting with the defending metrics, Kuikka is a warrior at the back for Finland, winning over 50% of her duels per 90 — almost the most for her league. She is a smart player and knows how to read the game which is highlighted by her almost topping the league in interceptions.

One of Kuikka's weaknesses is in defending aerial duels, with her only winning about 40%. The aerial ability comes with a lack of height, as she is only 5 foot 5, giving her a disadvantage as a centre-back in the Finland shape. For shots blocked, she is also weak only blocking one every three matches. However, this may be a stylistic thing due to her simply not needing to block many shots during a match.

Passing is her biggest strength when compared to other defenders, with her lowest stat in accuracy in forward passes, which will be due to the style of the team with her long balls often hopeful into spaces of the pitch. With her passing strengths, she is super high for a defender with final third, penalty box and progressive passes as she is in the top 75% of the league. For key passes, she is in the top 70% of the league, which shows her importance in goal creation as well as defending for her sides.

When looking at the attacking metrics, you would suspect that she is a midfielder but it is because of her playstyle. She likes to get on the front foot with an interception and looks to ensure there is an end product to any attacks. Her dribbles per 90 are in the top 85% of the league with a success rate of 58%. For a defender, she averages one shot a game which is very high. She is a staple of the Finland team and gives them the freedom to play the way they do. As Kuikka is only 26, she will take a lot from this tournament no matter the result to use as experience in future major international tournaments.

TOURNAMENT PREDICTION

Finland are a dangerous team with the ability to catch out any team via their high press and intense playstyle, making them a tricky team to play in the group stage. With this playstyle and the frequency of matches at an international tournament, Finland will struggle to maintain this exhausting style.

Finland are in a very tough group with two of the favourites for the Women's Euro 2022 in Spain and Germany to contend with, making their chance of progression difficult. These two teams can exploit the weaknesses previously spoken about with the high calibre of players in their squads. The other team in their group is also very strong, with Denmark finishing as runners-up at the 2017 Euro tournament and semi-finalists in 2013. As seen in the Tournoi de France, Finland struggled against the higher ranking teams, where they only achieved one point in another difficult group stage, failing to score a single goal and finishing the three matches with a -8 goal difference.

Finland are not expected to progress which may benefit their playstyle, giving them the freedom to work as a team with an underdog mentality. Finland will be hoping to cause an upset in the group stage even if their chances of maintaining their playstyle deep into the tournament will be difficult.

GERMANY:

GROUP B

FINTAN O'REILLY // @FintanFootball

Germany are the most successful team in UEFA Women's Championship history with a grand total of eight tournament wins to their name, including one as 'West Germany'. An incredible six-tournament winning streak came to an end in 2017, as The Netherlands, not Germany, ended the tournament victorious for the very first time. This year, the Germans will undoubtedly be hoping to set the record straight and put themselves back on their perch under Martina Voss-Tecklenburg.

Several of their players will come into the tournament off the back of some encouraging individual campaigns at club level. Although Frauen Bundesliga side Wolfsburg bowed out of the Champions League in the semi-finals to Jonatan Giráldez's Barcelona Femení, Wolfsburg's Tabea Waßmuth ended the tournament as the second-highest scorer with 10 while Bayern Munich's Lea Schüller ended the campaign as Frauen Bundesliga's top scorer on 16 to help ensure her side pushed Wolfsburg fiercely in the title race. Voss-Tecklenburg will hope these two club rivals will work some magic alongside each other to give her side a fearsome forward line this summer.

Germany don't enter this tournament as favourites but it'd be foolish to write them off in this competition and they should at the very least progress to the advanced rounds. In our tactical analysis and team-focused scout report, we aim to provide some in-depth analysis of Germany, Voss-Tecklenburg's tactics and the key talking points regarding their performance in offensive, defensive and transitional phases.

PREDICTED STARTING XI

Germany Squad age profile
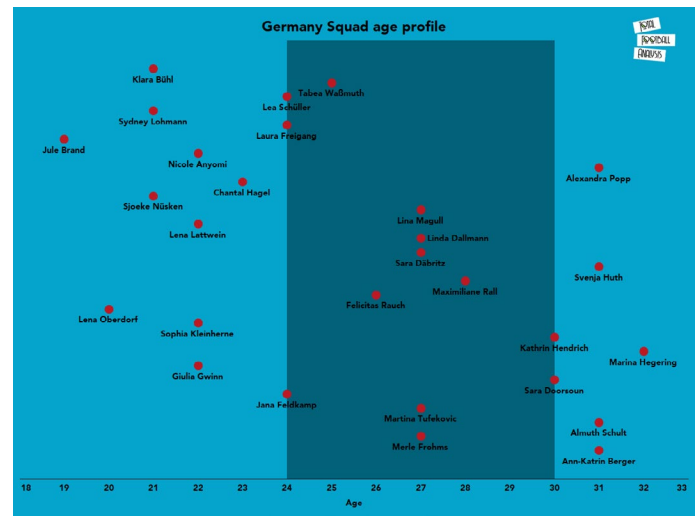
This section of our analysis will focus on our predicted Germany starting XI. Firstly, though, we must ask: what are the options? Well, look no further than figure 1 which provides an age scatter plot featuring all of the names present on Germany's current provisional squad for the European Championships, accurate as of the time of writing.

Of this 28-woman squad, 13 players fit into what we've marked off as the 'peak age range' of 24-30. Five of those players are on the border to either fitting into the 'youth' category or the 'experienced' category. Then, looking at those outside of the peak age range, it's clear from this graph that far more of this German team fall under 'youth' than fall under 'experienced', indicating that this is quite a young squad, though they do still have plenty of key players in the peak age-range who'll likely need to assume leadership roles in the young squad for this summer's tournament.

As for our predicted starting XI, see figure 2; we've gone for a 4-3-3 shape as this is the formation that Voss-Tecklenburg has set her side up in most often leading up to this tournament and in goal, we've gone for Eintracht Frankfurt's Merle Frohms, who wears Germany's number one shirt and we imagine will retain the number one position for the Euros.

In front of her, we've gone for a back four of two attacking full-back options in Wolfsburg's Felicitas Rauch on the left and Bayern Munich's Giulia Gwinn on the right, either side of Bayern's Marina Hegering at left centre-back and Eintracht Frankfurt's Sophia Kleinherne at right centre-back. These two women have lined up alongside each other for the national team in the past and we believe that the two complement each other's playing styles quite well to form a potentially formidable partnership at the heart of Die Nationalelf's backline.

We've put a midfield three of Wolfsburg duo Lena Oberdorf (holding) and Svenja Huth along with former PSG player Sara Däbritz in the heart of Die Nationalelf. This was a tough area of the pitch to decide on but we feel Oberdorf offers more than any other player as the holding midfielder to cover for her teammates defensively and control play along with Däbritz, who offers another solid option in possession and will likely be given a little more freedom to roam forward with the ball, though not as much as Huth, who we imagine will be the main creative force of this midfield operating in the right half-space and aiming to get into crossing positions from there quite frequently.

In attack, Germany have many exciting options to choose from, including Huth, who we've included in midfield but could easily feature in the front three off the right too as she has done in recent games. However, we've chosen her Wolfsburg teammate Tabea Waßmuth on the right — with the striker ending the season on fire and featuring quite often on the right along with in the centre of attack. She plays alongside Bayern Munich's Lea Schüller at centre-forward and the final member of our starting XI, Wolfsburg's newest recruit Jule Brand who we imagine will play at left-wing. We'll go into more detail on specific areas of the pitch and the options within them later in this scout report which could help to explain our decisions a little bit more.

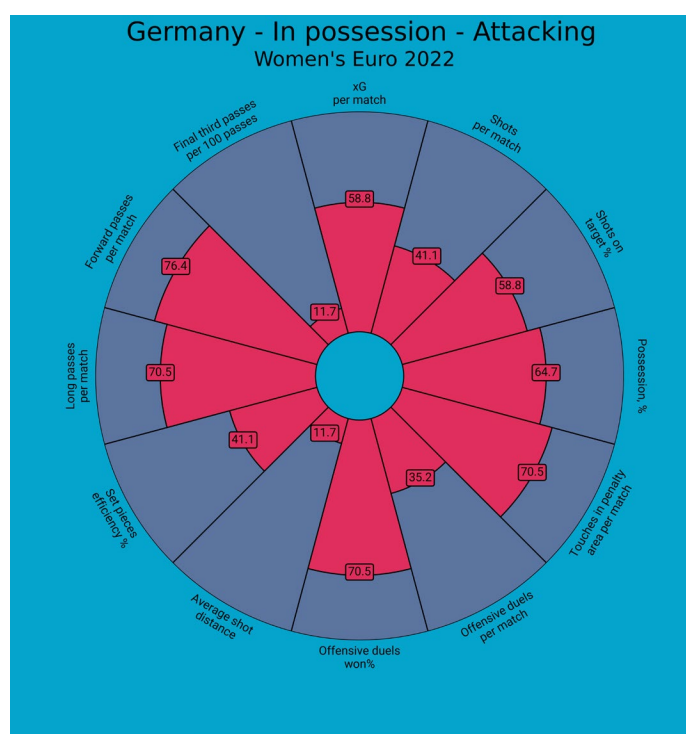# OFFENSIVE PHASES

Before going into detail on specific areas of the pitch and the options that Voss-Tecklenburg has, I'd like to outline some key points regarding her tactics and strategy as Die Nationalelf boss. We'll first provide an overview and some key points about her side in attacking phases, then look at defensive phases and finally, we'll look at Germany in transitional phases. Again, these

sections of analysis will help with explaining our starting XI selections as well as, perhaps, some of Voss-Tecklenburg's provisional squad selections.

Firstly, let's use this offence-focused pie radar in figure 3 and see what it tells us about Germany's attacking style of play. It's evident that Germany like to dominate the ball but they also like to get the ball forward with great regularity and play vertically, as is evident from their high percentile ranking in forward passes per match. They tend to take few long shots, instead working the ball into high-xG shooting positions and are generally quite efficient with their shooting in terms of accuracy as a result.
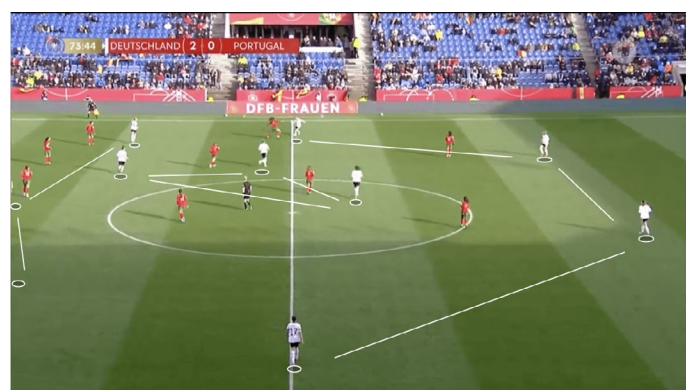
Figure 4 shows us Germany's general offensive shape, with their 4-3-3 becoming more of a 2-4-1-3 or 2-3-2-3 (depending on the position of one of the '8s' and whether they've dropped deep to sit alongside the holding midfielder or whether

they've pushed high to operate just behind the forward line alongside the other '8'). It's common to see Germany's centre-back duo forming a solid and reliable base of their offensive shape while the full-backs advance to sit on either side of their midfield three, which figure 4 also shows; the full-backs will be responsible for providing the offensive width for their team as play progresses upfield.

The midfield three, meanwhile, are generally quite fluid with lots of movement going on. We typically see the holding midfielder remain slightly deeper but the other two midfielders have licence to roam about, be that to form a double-pivot alongside the holding midfielder if that's where they're needed or move higher or rotate with their midfield partner at the '8' position.

The forwards will then play quite narrow and look to make alternating movements with some looking to link up with the midfielders and some looking to make darting runs at diagonal angles in behind the opposition's backline to give their deeper players lots and lots of options.

During the early attacking phase (build-up), we always see Germany's centre-backs split very wide on either side of the goalkeeper who'll be required to perform the 'sweeper-keeper' role in this team and essentially become a third centre-back during build-up and, at times, in ball progression too. It's common to see Frohms coming well outside of her box as Germany seek to dominate the opposition in terms of possession and effectively break past their first line of defence; we see an example of this from

a recent Germany game in figure 5.

This movement from the centre-backs in the early stages of possession (often immediately from the goal-kick) creates space for the goalkeeper to come outside the box, be brave and operate as a sweeper-keeper, while this also gives the full-backs the signal to push forward as the centre-backs are now occupying an area that'd be right on top of them should they stay in their typical full-back position. As a result, this basically sends the full-backs forward to operate on either side of midfield — where Voss-Tecklenburg wants them to be.

Germany look to build out from the back via short passes and create passageways through the opposition's defensive shape in this way. Generally, this works out quite well for them thanks to their players' familiarity and suitability for this type of football, particularly the centre-backs with our centre-back duo in this squad representing a couple of very comfortable and capable players in possession. However, they can at times still be vulnerable to a well-organised and aggressive high press; there are plenty of examples of Voss-Tecklenburg's team getting forced into individual errors in sensitive areas of the pitch as a result of the opposition's high press, and I'd say teams should look to test Germany and press them high if they're capable of doing so.

We see an example of Germany facing up against a high-pressing Portugal in figure 6 and we see one Portugal player, in particular, marking Germany's holding midfielder tightly. This can, of course, happen at times during the build-up

and as we alluded to earlier, it's common to see one of Germany's '8s' (it would be Däbritz more often in our starting XI) dropping in beside the holding midfielder to support her and provide another option for the goalkeeper and centre-backs. We see an example of this in figure 6. This is an intelligent way that Die Nationalelf look to break the opposition's press even when facing off against a very well-organised and intelligent pressing system.

In the final third, we know Germany's full-backs provide the offensive width in the squad and we know the wingers tend to sit narrower making diagonal runs in behind the backline. We see an example of this, along with a ball carrier in a wide right-sided position that we think Huth may be perfect for in this setup, in figure 7. It's really common to see Germany's wide forwards making in-to-out runs in behind the opposition's backline (and in between the centre-back and full-back) while it's also very common to see Germany's full-backs making surging runs forward from deep. We see both in figure 7 to give this ball carrier options.

We also see from this image how Germany like to create wide overloads in the final third to break through the opposition and create crossing opportunities. Here, the aggressive and intelligent runs from the full-back and wide forward create a 2v1 versus the opposition's full-back (pretty much a 3v1 if you include the ball carrier). This is incredibly difficult to defend against and if Germany can create some of these in the Euros, they won't struggle to create chances too.

DEFENSIVE PHASES

Next up, we'll look at Germany's performance in defensive phases of play. Again, we'll first look at a pie radar (this time focusing on defence) and see what that tells us about Germany's defensive style before then looking at some in-game examples to explain some points we feel relevant about Germany's defence based on our video analysis.

Germany - Out of possession - Defending
Women's Euro 2022
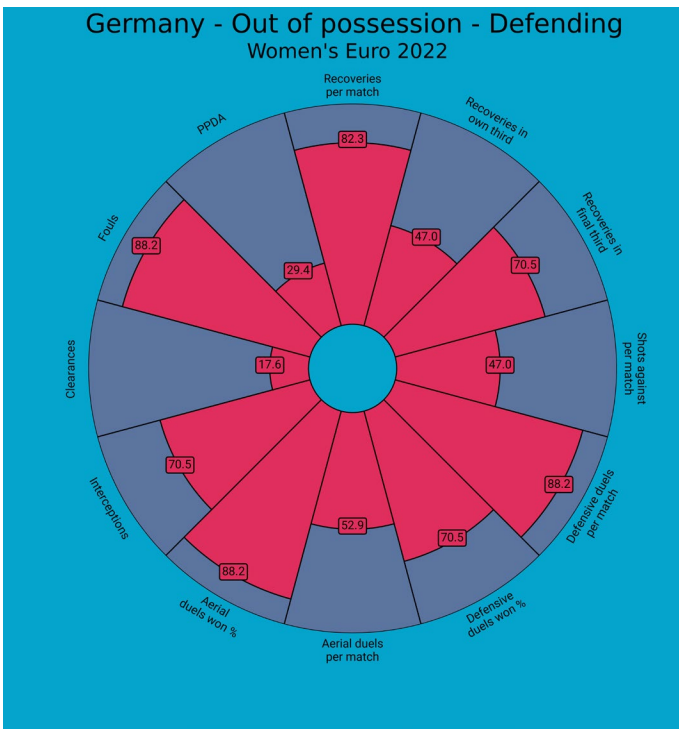
As figure 8 indicates and as you might suspect, Germany are typically aggressive without the ball. Voss-Tecklenburg likes her team to win the ball far away from their own goal but close to the opposition's goal — in part to create opportunities to then score from a transition to attack close to the opposition's goal, which would typically be very dangerous. This is evident from Germany's low percentile ranking in PPDA, along with high percentile ranking in recoveries per match, recoveries in the final third, defensive duels per match and interceptions. They're a very defensively-active team which plays a part in their possession dominance and the profiles necessary for the squad.

Germany usually defend in a 4-1-4-1 shape (we see just the second 4-1 of that shape in figure 9). They typically defend in a position-oriented manner, generally looking to corral the opposition to one side of the pitch before players shift over to that side from the centre and the opposite wing to trap the opposition there with no near passing options available and no opportunity to switch the ball due to the immediate pressure on the ball carrier. This is why we see the right-winger occupying a very central position in figure 9. Here, we also see that the opposition have opted to turn and send the ball back to the goalkeeper to try and escape Germany's pressure, with no opportunity to play forward left open for them.
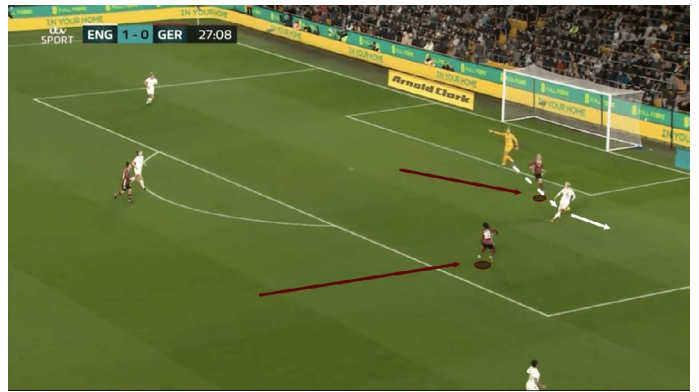
As the ball made its way back to the 'keeper, the centre-forward followed aggressively, as did the right central midfielder and right-winger. Now, in figure 10, after the opposition 'keeper has passed to their left centre-back, we see that the right central midfielder has advanced to pick up the opposition's holding midfielder while the right-winger has advanced from her previous central position to be sitting just behind the left centre-back to put her under pressure, along with the striker, as she receives the ball here. The Germans force the opposition centre-back into an initial negative touch as she's forced to face

her own byline but from there, the receiver does brilliantly to turn out onto her left foot and send the ball to her supporting left-back.

This was some very intelligent play and great technical ability on display from the left centre-back but she was forced to be very, very good here to escape Germany's aggressive pressure. Not every player Germany come up against will perform this well every time and their aggressive pressure will create chances for them, as well as stifle the opposition's build-up close to their own goal, which is exactly what Voss-Tecklenburg wants.
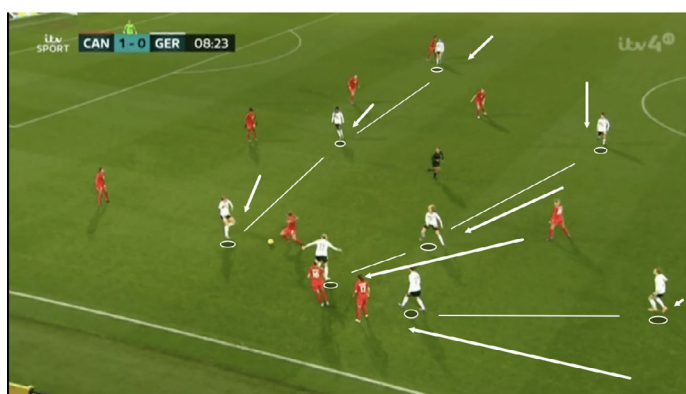
We see another example of Germany's aggressive pressing in figures 11-12. Firstly, in figure 11, we see German bodies closing in on an opposition ball carrier in a deep right position, with that player on the receiving end of a pass just before this image. We see Germany's left-winger and left central midfielder applying immediate pressure here, with the left-back positioning herself aggressively in support out wide and the holding midfielder doing the same to block a potentially devastating passing lane through the centre. Meanwhile, figure 11 also shows how Germany's right central midfielder, left centre-back, centre-forward and right-winger have shifted over towards the left — though to a lesser extent — to support the pressing players too. It's important for Germany that when someone moves into a particular player's zone, they jump immediately to cover that player, especially when the ball is played to that player. It's then the responsibility of her teammates to provide adequate cover for her to act so aggressively.

The organised and aggressive pressure on the ball carrier here leaves her with little choice but to send the ball backwards, triggering Germany's press to push up and squeeze the opposition even more, which we see as we progress into figure 12.
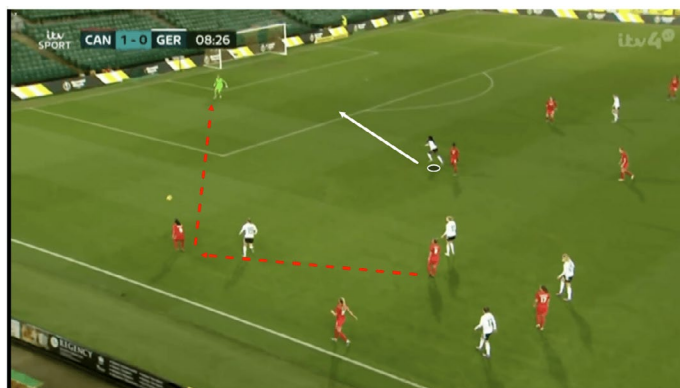
As the ball makes its way back to the opposition's keeper, Germany's centre-forward has a crucial role to play. She must jump immediately to close the 'keeper down, yes, but also to close the passing lanes to the opposite wing and prevent the 'keeper from turning out to avail of the potential switch of play. If the goalkeeper is allowed to turn out here, it'd be disastrous for Germany as they have their players oriented to the left-wing right now. As a result, it's crucial that they keep the pitch cut in half and keep the opposition enclosed on this wing, which the centre-forward manages to achieve here as she presses quickly and more importantly intelligently to cut the passing lanes to the right and make it impossible for the 'keeper to turn out without showing too much of the ball to the centre-forward.

As play moves on from figure 12, we see the 'keeper panic and send the ball out of play on the left wing, giving Germany an excellent chance to build into the opposition's box via a high throw-in. This passage of play provides an excellent example of why Voss-Tecklenburg likes her side to press high so much, as they can create excellent attacking opportunities as a result of such an approach, as well as just stopping the opposition's attack before it really gets going.
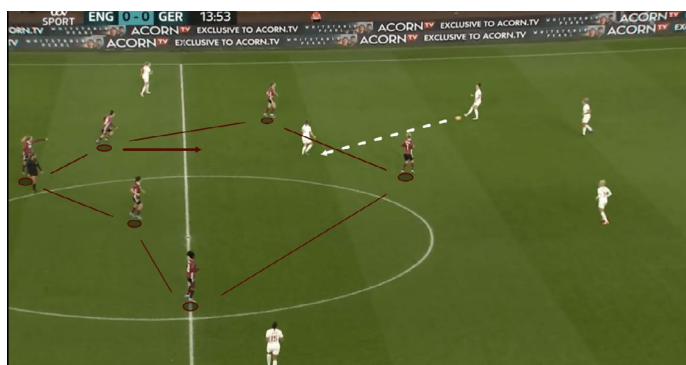
It's paramount that Germany leave no opposition player with space to receive and turn, as this can lead to their defensive structure being cut through like a knife through butter. This means the midfielders and forwards must be constantly alert and disciplined to cover options that enter their zone, as well as good communicators with their teammates to ensure everyone is aware of where the danger is and whose responsibility it is to deal with it. Figure 13 shows a lack of organisation in Germany's mid-block versus England, which allowed a midfielder to receive inside their defensive shape just behind their first line and cut through them quickly, which ultimately put Die Nationalelf in a very tough position.

Firstly, figure 13 shows England playing the ball to a free woman in midfield behind Germany's centre-forward, alongside the left-winger and in front of the left central midfielder. Nobody immediately picks this option up, allowing her to receive and turn with freedom before the left central midfielder eventually pushes up and tries to close her down.
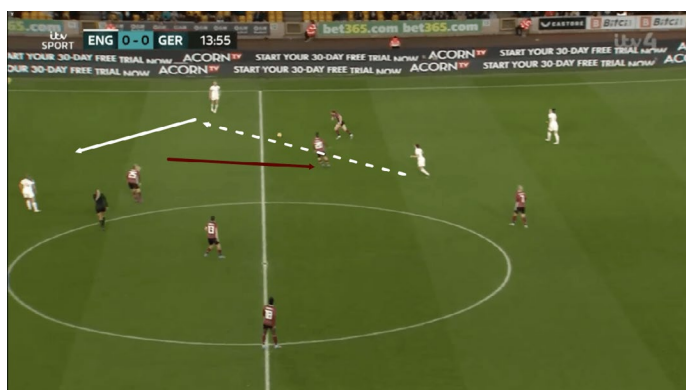
Moving into figure 14, the left central midfielder was too slow to jump as the danger became apparent and her late movement simply served

to allow space behind her to open up for the next receiver, the opposition wide woman on the right-wing, to receive and charge into. This example shows how important it is for Germany's players to be constantly alert and organised, as well as good communicators. All of this, along with, obviously, physical capabilities, is crucial when it comes to operating an aggressive press effectively. So, Germany must limit instances like this in the summer to stand a chance against the cream of the crop in this competition.

TRANSITIONS

Thirdly, we'll look at Germany's performance in transitional phases. This section of analysis will take a look at Germany both in transition to attack and in transition to defence via some in-game examples based on our video analysis of Voss-Tecklenburg's team in action.

Starting with transition to defence, figure 15 shows an example of Germany's rest defence structure. As Germany's play progresses into the chance creation phase, their full-backs typically end up on either side of the front three and we see that here in figure 15, although they've narrowed their positioning at this point to try and contend with the opposition's counter-attack via counter-pressing before this image. Other than the full-backs, though, Germany's shape looks pretty much as you'd expect for a 4-3-3/4-1-4-1 base shape. As mentioned earlier when discussing their build-up and ball progression, the two centre-backs form a base for the team to build off while the three-woman

midfield triangle sits just in front of them with the holding midfielder sitting slightly deeper than her teammates in this position. Of course, this also serves to form a base 2-3 shape for their rest defence, as figure 15 depicts.

Similar to when discussing their pressing tactics, it's important that Germany's midfielders, in particular, possess good spatial awareness, decision-making and physical traits as the opposition begin to break through the centre. Generally, Voss-Tecklenburg wants her team counter-pressing with high intensity and to defend aggressively to win the ball as far up the pitch — and away from their own goal — as possible. On this occasion in our example, the opposition have managed to cut through Germany's midfield again as the press didn't close the opposition down enough and ultimately gave them too much space to play with, leaving forward passing options in too much space which allowed the opposition to progress. If teams can expose Germany in transition like this during the summer should the Germans not counter-press effectively enough, which is certainly a possibility and something we've seen at times, then this will be a weakness in their game.

A solid defensive work rate is important for everyone in this German team, including the forwards. The players who start in Voss-Tecklenburg's team will need to be good at defending on the front foot and also comfortable with tracking back should the opposition progress beyond their initial press to help out those positioned deeper. We see an example of Germany's right-winger dropping deep to help

her side out in figure 16 and as play moves on from this image, we see the winger successfully regain possession from the opposition ball carrier out wide, demonstrating some effective defensive effort on her behalf.

The right-winger goes on to link up with the ball-near central midfielder via a one-two after regaining possession before she moved into the position we see her occupying in figure 17. From here, the winger can drill a through ball around the outside of the opposition's widest defender currently in the backline, finding the centre-forward's run. Note, again, the in-to-out running path of the attacker in the forward line — this type of run, while also being angled between two opposition defenders, is extremely common from Germany's attackers; we see this kind of movement regularly during settled attacks and in transitions.

The run works well with Germany's tendency to break into the final third via wide overloads and if there is more than one player in the forward line at the time of the pass being played, this kind of run that we've seen in both figure 17 and figure 7 now from the ball-near player can also serve to create space for a teammate positioned closer to goal, as this movement can attract a centre-back out wide, thus creating more space centrally too. So, expect to see Germany's playmakers getting their heads up and looking for this kind of movement from those in the front three in the European Championships.
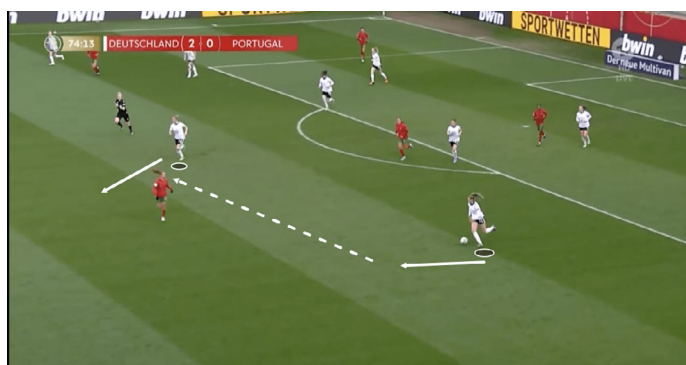
We see one more example of a German counter-attack in figures 18-19, this time with Die Nationalelf beginning their counter-attack from deep. The ball was turned over by Germany just before this image and we see the ball carrier immediately looking to get her team upfield and away from their own goal. She's helped by some intelligent movement from the midfielder marked beside her in this image, as that player darts out to support and create a 2v1 overload with the ball carrier against the opposition player looking to close down the dribbler.

As play moves on from here, we see the ball carrier actually take up the option offered to her by her midfield teammate as she plays her through in the centre to continue Germany's progress through Portugal's midfield in transition.

That midfielder then ends up attracting plenty of attention from opposition players as she enters the middle third of the pitch but Portugal's pressure isn't good enough to stop the ball carrier from threading a wonderfully-timed and well-weighted through ball into the striker's in-to-out running path, again showing how Germany's players are very familiar with each other's movement in this team, with the midfielders well aware of how and where their

attackers will typically go as they look to break beyond the opposition's backline. So, some intelligent decision-making, good technical play and familiarity with one another helped Germany to get out of their own half and into the opposition's in this passage of play and Voss-Tecklenburg will be relying on these qualities from her players if they're to produce some successful transitions in the Euros. Germany can hurt teams in this phase of play but it relies on the aforementioned qualities.

DEFENDERS

Now, returning to the player's we've selected, again we've gone for Frohms in goal, Rauch at left-back, Gwinn at right-back, Hegering at left centre-back and Kleinherne at right centre-back and we feel these players certainly offer Germany what they need in the corresponding positions. As is evident from our tactical analysis in the previous three sections, Germany require a 'keeper who's comfortable with her feet and coming off her line. Frohms matches that description from the available options, hence why she's been wearing the number one shirt.

As for the full-backs, it's clear that Germany require two players who are going to play a largely attacking role and offer a lot inside the final third, essentially acting as wingers in the team's offensive 2-3-5 as they move into the chance creation phase. Over the last calendar year, Rauch has produced an impressive 5.29 xA while Gwinn has produced 4.71 xA, both of which rank extremely highly when compared with other German full-backs.

Gwinn is a great attacking option at full-back who's capable of providing an option on either wing. However, she has generally been a slightly less reliable crosser than our other starting full-back, Rauch — although crossing varies a lot and isn't at all the only indicator one should use as to

whether or not the player should be on the pitch, even if it is an important aspect of that particular role. The flexibility of Gwinn to cover both wings will be valuable in tournament football.

As for the centre-backs, Hegering and Kleinherne are both solid options on the ball, with Hegering, in particular, representing an excellent option when it comes to progressing her team through the thirds, having made an impressive 9.61 progressive passes per 90 over the last calendar year. Kleinherne is a relatively safe and secure passer when necessary while Hegering is also capable of playing this way but tends to take more risks and be braver on the ball. The team will benefit from Kleinherne's composure, in that regard, as they need players in deep areas who won't crumble under pressure. This isn't to say Hegering and/or Kleinherne won't struggle if pressed hard — we think they might — however, they give their team the best chance of playing out from the back as they hope to, while Kathrin Hendrich presents another option that could be serviceable backup in this area.

We like the Hegering/Kleinherne duo as well because of how they complement each other off the ball. Kleinherne is noticeably more aggressive than Hegering while the latter prefers to operate in a more passive role and from our video analysis, this combination works quite well, with both players demonstrating a good understanding with the other, so Voss-Tecklenburg may be hoping to bank on what appears like good chemistry in such an important area of the pitch this summer.

MIDFIELDERS

Lena Oberdorf will be required to sit at the base of Germany's midfield, offering an option behind the first line of pressure for the centre-backs and 'keeper to aim for, as well as offering a nearby passing option for her midfield partners to link up with if needed. Oberdorf is an excellent ball progressor and in a team that likes to dominate but at the same time play vertically when possible, this will be an important quality in the middle of the park. Furthermore, Oberdorf's ability to read the game will be important in defensive phases and in transition to defence, as we analysed in the previous sections how important the holding midfielder's role is in this team in that regard.

Another option for this role in the squad include Wolfsburg's Lena Lattwein, who's a very good option in terms of ball retention but perhaps doesn't offer as much progression as Oberdorf does.

Alongside her on the left, we've gone for Däbritz who is great with ball retention but is comfortable enough to progress via carries and will enjoy the freedom offered in this role to get forward and supply those ahead of her while also being able to drop deep alongside Oberdorf and offer support there when required. Another option for this position is the experienced Alexandra Popp who — yes, has normally been a striker — but has also been dropping deeper and has plenty of experience under her belt now operating as a left central midfielder. So, as an attacking option in this position, Popp could offer a versatile squad option — always helpful in tournament football.

At right central midfield, we've gone for Svenja Huth. Again, Huth has played plenty of games on the wing but we feel she'd be an ideal fit for the deeper position just behind the front three in this team because of how she can supply the runners ahead of her thanks to her excellent creative passing ability. Furthermore, as we saw back in figure 7, Germany's right central midfielder can end up in a good crossing position in the right half-space in the chance creation phase, which is a position and role that'd suit Huth very well so all in all, we feel she

offers Germany an excellent option as the more attacking member of the midfield three from right central midfield. Another potential option in this position is Bayern Munich's Lina Magull, who's played plenty of games on the right of Germany's midfield as the team's most attacking midfielder of late. Magull is another who could easily supply the runners from in-to-out ahead of her with through balls behind the opposition backline and will almost certainly be a member of Voss-Tecklenburg's final squad, in our view.

FORWARDS

As for the forwards, we've gone for Jule Brand on the left, Tabea Waßmuth on the right and Lea Schüller through the middle. Starting with Brand, she is certainly more comfortable on the left and we feel she's the best option for this position in terms of offering creativity, dribbling quality and a runner in behind. Simply put, she's Germany's most dangerous left-sided attacker and so she just pips Klara Bühl into our starting XI, though both women offer a lot of what Voss-Tecklenburg will be looking for in this area of the pitch and we'd expect both to see game time this summer.

Centrally, we've gone with Schüller although Waßmuth also offers a very comfortable and solid option in this position. However, coming off the back of an extremely prolific season at club level, it didn't feel right to leave Schüller out of the team altogether and Waßmuth is equally comfortable with playing on the right so this felt like a sensible way of approaching the squad selection. Additionally, Waßmuth offers much more than Schüller defensively and we feel this will be more valuable on the wing than it will be centrally. As a result, we feel Schüller will start centrally though Waßmuth may be first-choice backup here and could see some game time centrally.

On the right, of course, Waßmuth is our go-to thanks to a lot of the reasons we discussed in the previous paragraph. Waßmuth is a dangerous attacker who'll be looking to play quite narrow on the right-wing a lot of the time while also offering plenty in terms of defensive effort. Another option on the right is provided by Nicole Anyomi who can also offer plenty of creativity from the wing as well as intelligent runs in behind and great defensive effort. Again, I'd expect both of these names to feature at some point for Germany during the tournament. We also can't rule out the possibility of Huth playing in this position and looking to be more of a traditional winger from here, exercising her crossing directly from the right-wing, though she offers far less in terms of defensive work than Waßmuth and Anyomi, so may not feature in this position as a result, due to the importance that will be placed on the wingers tracking back and engaging actively in the team's pressing, as we analysed in previous sections of this scout report.

BEST PERFORMER

For our 'best player' section, we're spoiled for choice thanks to the plethora of outstanding attacking options, vital midfield pieces and important defensive choices at Voss-Tecklenburg's disposal. However, we've chosen to go into detail on Huth for this section because regardless of where she ends up playing in the team, we feel Voss-Tecklenburg should certainly find a way to maximise her creativity and attacking output, and if she manages to do so, then this can only work out well for Germany.

Player Name: S. Huth — Player Age: 31 — Team Name: Wolfsburg — Position: AMF, LW, RAMF — Minutes played: 1,796 — Market value: €0 — Contract: — On Loan: no — Preferred foot: — Weight: 0 kg — Height: 163 cm — Nationality: Germany

Attacking metrics

	Per 90	Percentage
Non-penalty goals per 90	0.20	74.4
xG per 90	0.16	67.4
Touches in box per 90	3.51	93
Shots per 90	1.70	76.7
Shots on target, %	41.18%	65.1
Assists per 90	0.70	96.5
Offensive duels per 90	9.32	72
Offensive duels won, %	51.61%	97.6
Dribbles per 90	4.66	88.3
Successful dribbles, %	74.19%	93
Head goals per 90	0.00	2.3

Passing metrics

	Per 90	Percentage
Accurate forward passes, %	66.08%	76.70
Passes per 90	48.26	74.40
Accurate passes, %	77.78%	63.70
Passes to final third per 90	5.86	44.10
Passes to penalty area per 90	4.96	97.60
Progressive passes per 90	7.82	76.70
Smart passes per 90	1	90.60
Key passes per 90	1	93.00
Through passes per 90	1.5	83.70
Long passes per 90	2.86	27.90
Average pass length, m	16.77	37.20

Defending metrics

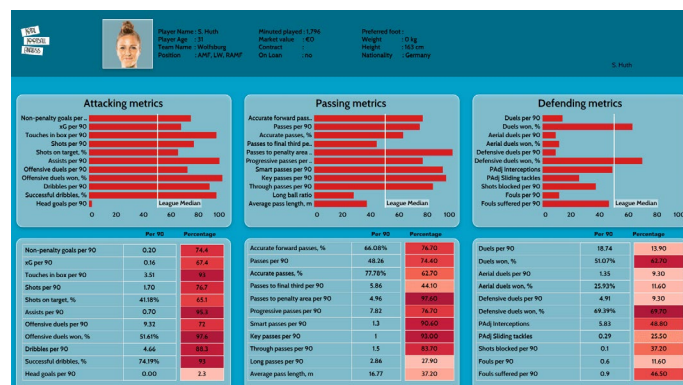|	Per 90	Percentage
Duels per 90	18.74	13.90
Duels won, %	51.07%	63.70
Aerial duels per 90	1.35	9.30
Aerial duels won, %	25.93%	11.60
Defensive duels per 90	4.91	9.30
Defensive duels won, %	69.39%	69.70
PAdj Interceptions	5.83	48.60
PAdj Sliding tackles	0.29	23.50
Shots blocked per 90	0.1	37.20
Fouls per 90	0.6	11.60
Fouls suffered per 90	0.9	46.50

Figure 20 breaks down Huth's domestic performances with Wolfsburg for the last calendar year and compares her statistics in each noted area with the league (Frauen-Bundesliga) median. As we can see, she's an elite attacking midfielder, from an attacking perspective. She performs particularly well at getting into the box and providing an additional goal threat, perhaps she can execute some late runs into the box for Germany this summer to add one or two goals to their tally. As well as actual output, Huth stands out in both dribble and offensive duel volume and success rate, indicating that she's comfortable with frequently taking on opposition defenders and also often succeeds when she opts to do so.

Again, as mentioned in the previous section, she doesn't have a defensive work rate to write home about although her defensive duel success rate is actually quite good, it's just the volume that's low. However, she hopes to make up for that with Germany in the summer via her creativity. Turning our attention to her passing metrics, it's clear why we've selected Huth as our player to watch for Die Nationalelf. She excels in progressing the ball into the penalty area — and tends to do this via a high volume of through balls and smart passes. Smart passes give us a good indication of how often a playmaker breaks lines, and this is a very important quality in any team but will be extremely helpful for Germany this summer as Huth can play the role of supplying the runners ahead of her with quality balls to chase.

There are plenty of intelligent, high-quality runners in Germany's forward line, they need someone to supply them and feed their runs; Huth is the person to do that and if she's given the right role this summer, then she has all the quality to star in the Euros for her country.

TOURNAMENT PREDICTION

So, will Huth and the rest of Germany's quality-packed team under Voss-Tecklenburg bring enough to add another victory to Germany's illustrious history in this tournament? Only time will truly tell and we certainly feel that Die Nationalelf have a lot to be excited about going into the tournament, but ultimately, we don't predict they'll add a ninth European Championship to their trophy cabinet simply due to the quality of competition in this summer's tournament — we feel there are a few teams that may be better placed to win this one rather than Germany. They do have the quality to advance into the later rounds of the tournament but with that said, their group is a tough one and they shouldn't look beyond that for the time being.

SPAIN:

GROUP B

CAIO MIGUEL // @osegundovolante

Despite only making it to the semi-finals of an international competition once, with that journey occurring back in 1997, Spain enter this competition as one of the favourites. Led by 40-year-old Jorge Vilda, Spain aim to translate their recent growth and domestic success, especially Barcelona's, to their national team. This Spanish generation is responsible for taking La Roja to the next step. After making it to the quarter-finals in the 2013 Women's Euro, they qualified for the 2015 World Cup for the first time in their history. Similar success was maintained in the next cycle, but they took it further by qualifying for the Round of 16 in the 2019 World Cup. With a mixture of experienced first-class players and a few talented youngsters, they look to take the final step and enter the world's elite in this World Cup cycle.

The Women's Euro 2022 provides the perfect opportunity for La Roja. Jorge Vilda has been in charge since 2015, having previously been managing Spain's national youth teams. After almost seven years in charge, Vilda's identity is imprinted onto this talented Spain side. Spain's Group B is a rather tricky one, with no easy matches on the horizon. While Finland may be their weakest opponent, they still have some very good players in Portland Thorns defender Natalia Kuikka and former Montpellier forward Adelina Engman. Furthermore, Germany and Denmark have very dangerous sides, and these two matches will prove incredibly decisive. With only three matches in the group stage, the margin for error will be extremely small.

PREDICTED STARTING XI

Jorge Vilda's Spain are structured in a traditional 4-3-3. This formation perfectly complements Vilda's tactics and the Spanish identity. As we will see in this analysis, La Roja's playing style is built around the idea of having the ball and Vilda is able to execute this style so effectively due to the overwhelming talent in his hands.

From the starting XI seen above, nine of them play for Barcelona, who happen to be one of the most dominant teams in the world at present. Not only are they incredibly talented, but they are also very familiar with playing alongside each other. Familiarity tends to be a significant factor in national teams, especially ones filled

with such talent. It is fair to say Spain won't suffer from this. In addition to having a large core from Barcelona, they also possess some of the best talents from the remaining teams. La Roja have incredible depth and tremendous quality.

As far as the age profile, we can see that the majority of this Spanish squad are in their prime. With the exception of Claudia Zornoza, there are no players over 30. On the other hand, there are a few very good young players breaking into the team. While still somewhat young, Jorge Vilda could not have asked for a better age profile to work with.

ATTACKING PHASE
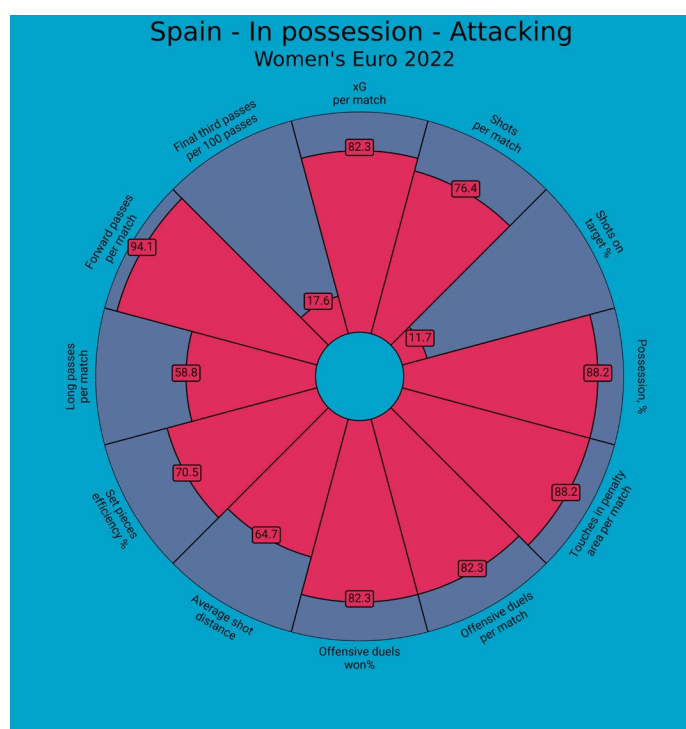
In 2010, the men's first World Cup title symbolised decades of evolution, evolution not only in quality but in identity. The contribution of foreign legends such as Alfredo Di Stéfano and Johan Cruyff in shaping this identity cannot be understated. Nonetheless, Spain had their own philosophy and playing style. This identity has not only been preserved throughout recent generations, but it has also translated into the women's national team.

Some may not like Jorge Vilda, but his alignment with the traditional Spanish style cannot be disputed. These tactics can be seen on many levels. The statistics mirror what any tactical analysis would display, from organisation to behaviour. Some credit must also be given to the fact that a majority of the squad play for Barcelona, a team with a strong and very similar identity.

In the attacking phase, Spain is famous for its high tempo controlled possession style. This style is built around the desire for the ball, not necessarily space. Dominating possession and averaging an incredibly high number of passes is almost a requirement, as it exclusively allows them to carry out their principles. Relentless pressing is, of course, a huge factor in that as we will examine later. However, there are a few key principles that are not only important but define their style.

First, it is important to understand their structure. Vilda prefers a traditional 4-3-3 shape, and this is maintained in possession. This structure is very fluid and free-flowing for two reasons. Firstly, players have varying roles which will see them occupying different spaces throughout the pitch. Additionally, their system is based on constant approximation and numerical superiority. As a consequence, players will freely flow among themselves and not have such a rigid structure. Initially, though, the structure will be a 4-3-3.
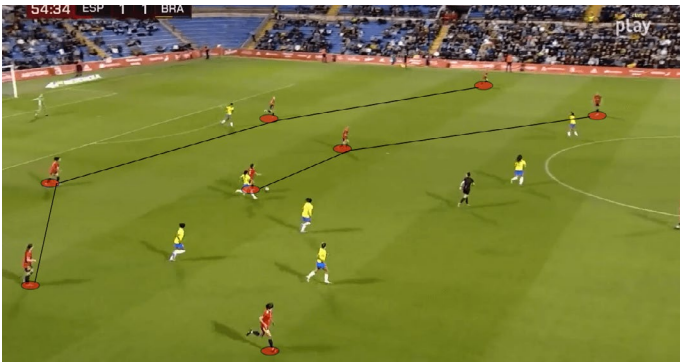
One of the main principles that allow for this style of controlled possession is constant approximation. La Roja are famous for relentless quick short passes. They essentially aim to create numerical superiority around the ball to progress through the zones as a unit and in a controlled fashion. In order for this to work, players must constantly support possession. Simply standing around the ball, though, would congest play and be far too easy to defend. On the contrary, players are in constant movement to find space to receive the ball, disrupt the defensive organisation, and support possession. Following a loose 4-3-3 structure, players will flow naturally to retain possession.

In summary, Vilda's Spain has the famous Spanish style of possession-based, high-tempo short pass-heavy football. Numerous principles are essential for this style to be effective, and La Roja execute them very well. This ideal style is not only executed well but clearly translates into statistics. As seen in the initial statistical overview, Spain often dominate possession in the opposition half. A high number of shots per match and touches in the opposition penalty area further illustrate this.

DEFENSIVE PHASE
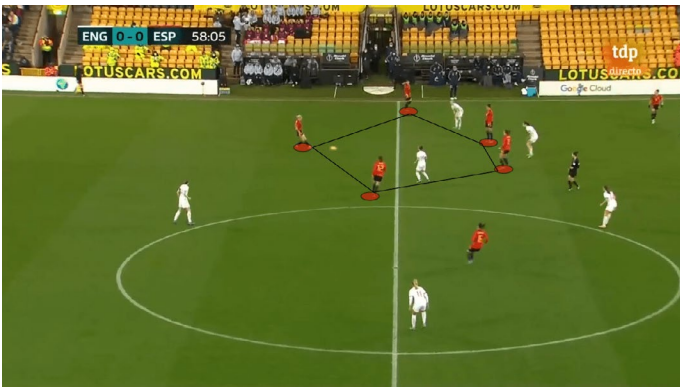
Constant movement is a crucial factor in allowing this system to be effective. It significantly disrupts the defensive structure and creates space. In the example below, Hermoso makes a quick pass to Ouahabi, who instantly passes it wide for Putellas. Meanwhile, Hermoso is already attacking the depth. By doing this, she creates space where she previously was while also offering another passing lane.
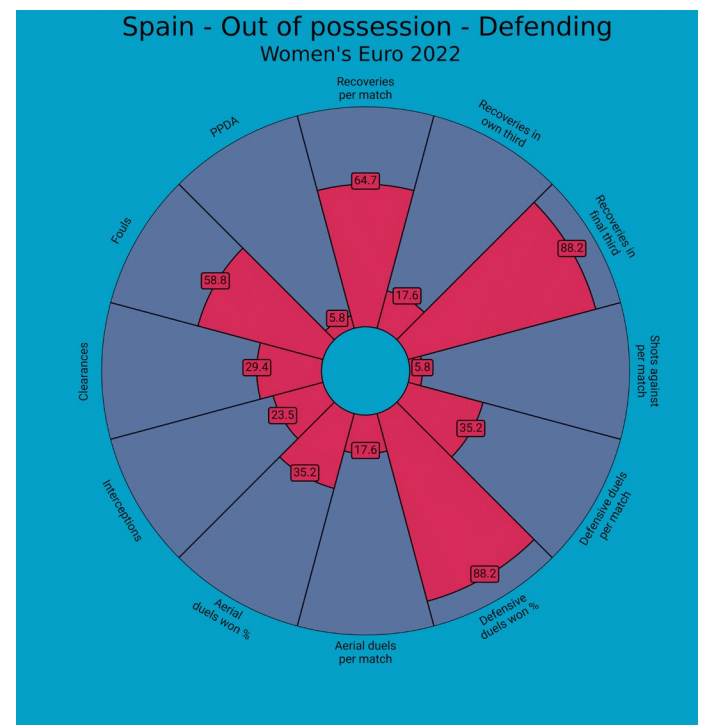
As mentioned, Spain's idea of football is built around having the ball. Therefore, when not in possession, the objective is to recover it as soon as possible. This is clearly translated into their statistics. As seen above, they rank significantly low in the volume of aerial duels,

interceptions, clearances, and shots against. This is a consequence of often dominating possession and simply not having to defend as much. This domination, though, is not simply given, but rather earned through their relentless work in the defensive phase.

La Roja rank significantly high in recoveries in the final third and the percentage of defensive duels won. These metrics highlight where they do their defensive work and how effective they are. Their PPDA rank is incredibly low as they average a very low PPDA. The structure through which they press is so organised and coordinated that they are rarely played through and often recover the ball in the final third.

Obviously, Spain have a rather aggressive pressing structure. Usually, one forward will split the centre-backs while other players close down passing lanes. Vilda's system, however, has one of the midfielders, often Bonmatí, step up and press alongside the centre-forward. This 4-4-2 of sorts will move incredibly compact as a unit to compress the opposition's playing area.

Moving as a unit is a significant characteristic of their press and allows them to be so overwhelming. This is especially seen in the image below. As England direct their build-up on the right side, Spain's press shifts over. Bonmatí drops back into the midfield to close down their pivot. Spain's left-back pushes up while the midfield comes across. They can create a 5v3 in this section of the pitch and significantly overwhelm England. As in possession, numerical superiority and overloads are a key part of Spain's tactics.

In lower blocks, this intensity is maintained. While remaining compact, they still constantly press and relentlessly challenge the opposition. They sit in a 4-4-2 with Bonmatí sitting alongside the centre-forward as she would in a high block.

TRANSITIONS

La Furia Roja's behaviour in transition aligns with their principles in and out of possession. The same obsession around having the ball is kept, and their collective behaviour in transition aims to achieve that. Firstly, they adopt an intense counter-press system which is consistently effective. This system is especially effective for one factor. In possession, they move as a unit and are constantly around the ball. Consequently, when the ball is lost, they already have so many players there to win it back. It is a possession system that is built to instantly and smoothly transition to the next phase.

In the example below, after the Brazilian player wins the ball, Spain already has a player there to stop the immediate counterattack. Meanwhile, two other players come pressing from the other direction. La Roja surrounds the ball carrier and overwhelms them into losing possession.

Against Scotland, the same behaviour can be illustrated. While one player stops the Scottish player from immediately driving forward, others come in to swarm her. In this case, three players pressure and create a diamond shape around her, leaving her with no way out.

Transitioning to attack, Spain do not have an absolute strategy. Their behaviour is dependent on the situation at hand. When recovering the ball in their own third, they are hesitant to immediately throw players forward and will rather retain possession instead. In the middle third, the same can be said though there are times they push forward. When pressing high up the pitch, however, they will almost always counterattack upon recovering the ball. This is not only due to being in a very dangerous area but also often having numerical superiority in that area.

Vilda's side has one idea which dictates their tactics throughout the four different phases:

having the ball. In possession, they will value and dominate possession, attacking in a manner that does so while still being dangerous. Out of possession, they aim to recover the ball as soon as possible. In transition, the same idea is followed. Transitioning out of possession, they will immediately counter-press and attempt to recover the ball. Into possession, they will often simply retain possession though they will counterattack when higher up the pitch. In summary, the many principles and sub-principles revolve around the idea of having the ball.

FORWARDS

In the last calendar year, Spain has averaged 3.33 xG per 90 from 23.67 shots per 90. La Roja's attacking output is uncontested, with some key players leading the line. Unfortunately, Spain's all-time leading goalscorer, Jennifer Hermoso, has been ruled out of the competition due to injury. However, Barcelona's Clàudia Pina is one of the most probable replacements. Despite being just 20 years old, she scored 0.7 goals per 90 in the 2021/22 season. Although she is naturally a wide player, she has occasionally featured up top for Barcelona and is an amazing goalscorer. Athenea del Castillo, Esther González, and Amaiur Sarriegi are other possible replacements. Hermoso was such an important player, that replacing her will be no easy task.

On the left, Mariona Caldentey has been exceptional for Barcelona this season with 0.87 goals per 90 and 73.71 passes per 90. Her attacking output and involvement in possession are incredible. On the right, Athletic Club's Lucía García is the most probable option. García's numbers are not quite as impressive as she does not play for a club as dominant as Barcelona. However, she has still maintained a fairly good scoring output with 0.27 goals per 90 from 0.36 xG per 90.

MIDFIELDERS

The midfield is perhaps the most predictable section, with Vilda most likely deploying Barcelona's midfield trio. The deep-lying playmaker Patri Guijarro will be an unseen hero, orchestrating possession and dictating play. Ahead of her, Aitana Bonmatí will be joined by the best player in the world Alexia Putellas. Putellas' contribution to this Spanish side cannot be understated. Not only does she have an incredible goalscoring record for a midfielder, but she is a creative force that makes Spain's attack so dangerous. In the 2021/22 season, Putellas scored 0.88 goals per 90 and had 0.38 assists per 90 for club and country. The three's varying characteristics make them a well-balanced world-class midfield, already used to playing together for Barcelona.

DEFENDERS

Since the 2019 World Cup, Vilda's defensive system has been outstanding. La Roja's defence provides security and consistency that will prove essential in the knockout stages. Much of it is attributed to their ability to press high up the pitch and dominate possession. Nonetheless, their individual and collective work should not be undervalued.

The backline has been fairly consistent, with Ona Batlle on the right, María Pilar León and Irene Paredes centrally, and Leila Ouahabi on the left. Besides Batlle, the three others also played for Barcelona and are very familiar with each other. The fullbacks do an amazing job of providing support in the attack while the defence as a whole does an outstanding job of building up. Defensively, their consistency and organisation have been incredible, only conceding 0.36 goals per 90 in the last calendar year.

BEST PERFORMER

Player Name: Patricia Guijarro
Player Age: 24
Team Name: Barcelona
Position: DMF
Minutes played: 2,144
Market value: €0
Contract:
On Loan: No
Preferred foot:
Weight: 64 kg
Height: 170 cm
Nationality: Spain

Patricia Guijarro

Attacking metrics

	Per 90	Percentage
Non-penalty goals per 90	0.31	93.8
xG per 90	0.17	87.6
Touches in box per 90	1.64	87.6
Shots per 90	1.89	86.4
Shots on target, %	40.00%	71.6
Assists per 90	0.44	95
Offensive duels per 90	5.79	64.1
Offensive duels won, %	50.00%	93.8
Dribbles per 90	2.52	77.7
Successful dribbles, %	72.50%	91.3
Head goals per 90	0.13	93.8

Passing metrics

	Per 90	Percentage
Accurate forward passes, %	78.89%	95.00
Passes per 90	76.34	98.70
Accurate passes, %	87.22%	96.20
Passes to final third per 90	14.85	98.70
Passes to penalty area per 90	4.72	97.50
Progressive passes per 90	10.83	95.00
Smart passes per 90	1.38	88.00
Key passes per 90	0.63	11.30
Through passes per 90	2.71	93.80
Long passes per 90	6.36	58.00
Average pass length, m	18.5	61.70

Defending metrics

	Per 90	Percentage
Duels per 90	22.91	72.80
Duels won, %	61.54%	97.30
Aerial duels per 90	4.59	90.10
Aerial duels won, %	64.38%	93.80
Defensive duels per 90	9.25	77.70
Defensive duels won, %	69.39%	85.10
PAdj Interceptions	9.08	93.90
PAdj Sliding tackles	0.57	58.00
Shots blocked per 90	0.13	61.70
Fouls per 90	0.76	44.40
Fouls suffered per 90	0.57	45.60

While Putellas is undoubtedly Spain's, and the world's, best player, Patri Guijarro will be an unseen hero for La Furia Roja. The midfielder acts as the single pivot in a talented midfield trio. Her involvement in possession — as indicated in the image breaking down her domestic performances for the last calendar year and comparing her statistics in each area with the league median — is crucial, often orchestrating the build-up and dictating the attack. She is the heart of the team in and out of possession. Defensively, she will command and oversee the press, covering for any spaces left. She is also key in maintaining organisation and leading the midfield defensively.

Her profile above is outstanding in every category, highlighting her importance in all phases of the game. She has well-above-average statistics, leading most metrics and all three sections. Similar to Busquets in the men's team, she will be the glue that tactically holds the midfield and the team together.

TOURNAMENT PREDICTION

Despite only making it to the semi-finals once in 1997, Spain enter this year's Euro as one of the title candidates. Barcelona's recent success is the tip of the iceberg that makes La Roja so strong. Not only do they possess tremendous talent in every area, but they also have great depth. Jorge Vilda has been very successful in implementing a true Spanish identity to this side, playing beautiful and entertaining football.

JILL ROORD:

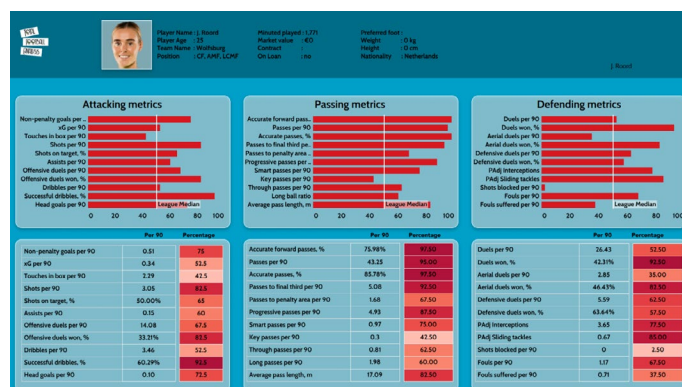NETHERLANDS

JACK MANSHIP // @JManship19

International tournaments are where legends are born. There are countless examples of players dazzling at international level with the knock-on effect being either a big transfer or a renewed impressive form at their current club. Jill Roord has impressed wherever she's played thus far in her career, and she hasn't even reached her peak years yet. This player profile will paint a clearer picture of the type of player she is and what she offers the Dutch side heading into Euro 2022, with an analysis of all aspects of her game.

BACKGROUND

The 25-year-old is a versatile midfielder, currently playing for Wolfsburg in the Frauen-Bundesliga. With a CV that boasts some famous previous clubs such as FC Twente, Bayern Munich and Arsenal, she is a well-established key figure of any team she steps into and could play a huge part in the Netherlands' Euro 2022 campaign.

In the latest campaign, she helped her side win the league title, losing just once in 22 games, scoring 82 times along the way. While her natural and most regular position is central midfield, she can play there in several roles, from box-to-box to an attacking midfielder. She also has experience playing on the left flank on an attacking line. From these positions, Roord has contributed 16 goals and six assists from 34 games in all competitions for Wolfsburg — form she will hope to carry through to this summer.

DATA ANALYSIS

Player Name : J. Roord	Minutes played : 1,771	Preferred foot :
Player Age : 25	Market value : €0	Weight : 0 kg
Team Name : Wolfsburg	Contract :	Height : 0 cm
Position : CF, AMF, LCMF	On Loan : no	Nationality : Netherlands

Attacking metrics

	Per 90	Percentage
Non-penalty goals per 90	0.51	76
xG per 90	0.34	53.5
Touches in box per 90	2.29	42.5
Shots per 90	3.05	82.5
Shots on target, %	50.00%	65
Assists per 90	0.15	60
Offensive duels per 90	14.08	67.5
Offensive duels won, %	33.21%	82.5
Dribbles per 90	3.46	52.5
Successful dribbles, %	60.29%	92.5
Head goals per 90	0.10	72.5

Passing metrics

	Per 90	Percentage
Accurate forward passes, %	75.98%	97.50
Passes per 90	43.25	95.00
Accurate passes, %	85.78%	97.50
Passes to final third pe...	5.08	92.50
Passes to penalty area per 90	1.68	67.50
Progressive passes per 90	4.93	87.50
Smart passes per 90	0.97	75.00
Key passes per 90	0.3	42.50
Through passes per 90	0.81	62.50
Long passes per 90	1.98	60.00
Average pass length, m	17.09	82.50

Defending metrics

	Per 90	Percentage
Duels per 90	26.43	52.50
Duels won, %	42.31%	92.50
Aerial duels per 90	2.85	35.00
Aerial duels won, %	46.43%	82.50
Defensive duels per 90	5.59	62.50
Defensive duels won, %	63.64%	57.50
PAdj Interceptions	3.65	77.50
PAdj Sliding tackles	0.67	85.00
Shots blocked per 90	0	2.50
Fouls per 90	1.17	67.50
Fouls suffered per 90	0.71	37.50

The data set above gives us a clearer indication of her importance at club level. When comparing her stats from this season against the league average, there are many areas in which she excels, especially when it comes to passing — and not many areas that should be considered weak spots.

In attacking metrics, her points of excellence fall within areas such as non-penalty goals per 90 (0.51), shots per 90 (3.05), offensive duels won % (33.21%) and successful dribbles % (60.29%). In all of these areas, Roord has shown exceptional talent and consistency which have made her a vital part of Wolfsburg this season. The numbers suggest a talent and good level of aggressiveness in the final third, while the percentile ranks for each of these metrics compared to the league median cement this.

However, there are some areas that don't possess such strong numbers, with touches in the box per 90 (2.29) and dribbles per 90 (3.46) standing out in that regard. When considering those numbers next to the percentile ranks, it gives a clearer idea of her playing style and perhaps aren't direct weaknesses at all. For example, the dribbles per 90 rank may have been low, but her dribble success rate is exceptional, suggesting she has good timing and decision-making when it comes to making a dribble attempt. Meanwhile, the low rank for touches in the box

per 90 suggests that Roord is more present and also more effective outside of the box, acting as a player to link play up between midfield and attack rather than being on the end of it.

Judging by her data in passing metrics, it looks as though Roord's forte is passing. Areas like accurate forward passes % and accurate passes % display a strong consistency in a range of passing, suggesting both an ability to help her team progress an attack but also to retain possession when necessary. We can see that her involvement is high as well thanks to metrics like passes per 90 (43.25), passes to final third per 90 (5.08), and progressive passes per 90 (4.93). All of these high-ranking passing metrics tell us that Roord is present in a high number of her team's moves. On the other end of the rankings, key passes per 90 might be an area in which she wants to improve as she only averages 0.3 per 90.

When analysing her defensive data, we can see that while she does contribute strongly in some areas, some metrics paint a clearer picture of her position and role in midfield, and it isn't a defensive one. She impresses in metrics like duels won % (42.3%), aerial duels won % (46.3%), PAdj interceptions (3.65) and PAdj sliding tackles (0.67), all of which suggest she is aggressive when required and capable of breaking up play in important spaces, as well as competing effectively in the air. However, she ranks low in metrics such as aerial duels per 90 (2.85), defensive duels per 90 (5.59), defensive duels won % (63.64%), shots blocked per 90 (0), and fouls suffered per 90 (0.71). When looking at some of these stats more closely, the first two mentioned are a low number of attempts on average but as we discussed previously, her win percentage is impressive. The other low-ranking metrics may be more to do with Roord's position and role rather than defensive ability, especially when considering her other defensive data.

ATTACKING PHASE

Since Jill Roord's contributions occur more frequently in an attacking sense, we will analyse her offensive play first. We will be taking a look at the positions she takes up to support attacks, as well as how her high level of passing ability helps her team. As you will see in the analysis below, she has a clever ability to locate small pockets of space and use them to her advantage and often bringing the opponent out of position. Her vision allows her to progress attacks with speed and precision.


This first example shows Roord taking up a position in between the opposition midfield and defensive lines in an attempt to use herself as an option to link up the play. Her positioning and body shape provides several possible next moves — she could turn out and play the ball to a teammate on the left, control the ball and look to drive at the opposition backline herself, or play a pass to the supporting wide player (which is the option she opted for). It is difficult to defend against Roord in the highlighted area because if one defender rushes out to press her, that will leave gaps elsewhere to be exploited, potentially leading to a goal-scoring opportunity.

Her high ranking when it comes to forward passing accuracy makes her extremely efficient with build-up play around the box, along with her high involvement with passing in general. She likes to get involved in any attacking phase she can and has the ability and composure to do so in tricky areas.
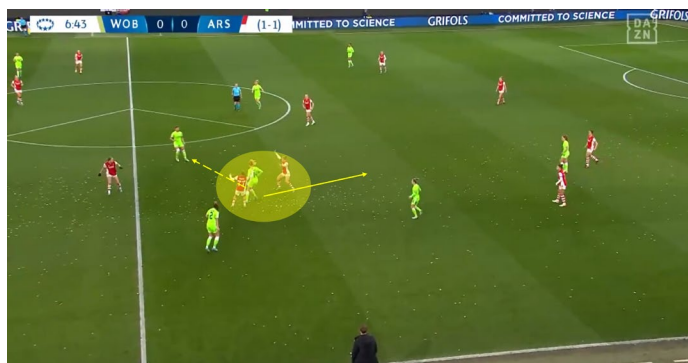
Here we see Roord drifting into space occupied by an opponent, but her presence causes a second opponent to rush in to try and block the attack. This created significant space higher up the pitch thanks to Arsenal's poor shape and organisation in midfield, but Roord needed to use composure and awareness to ensure the attack progresses. She is supported by a nearby teammate who is unmarked and offers support at a good distance and angle. Upon playing the pass to the teammate, Roord knows that wherever she moves next, she will be followed by her marker, and this will give her teammate more space and time to make the next move on the ball. Roord shows good agility and speed to get into positions before the opponent, and her move into the open space higher up forces Arsenal's midfield to retreat into a more defensive depth.
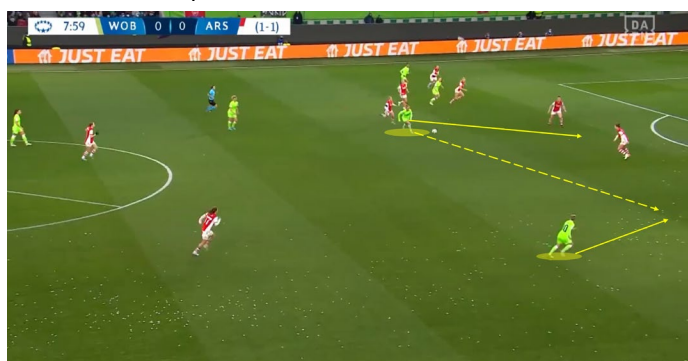
In this next example, again we see Roord operating in those spaces between midfield and defence, using the opposition's positioning to her advantage. In the image above, Arsenal's midfield is again unorganised, and they committed heavily to the right flank as they failed to stop the attack from progressing there. This leaves plenty of space in the centre, which is recognised by Roord who drives into the space upon receiving the ball before playing the

next pass to the supporting teammate arriving on the right flank, presenting a one-versus-one opportunity in a dangerous area. After she makes her pass, Roord continues her run but keeps to a more central location, readying her for a cross/pass at the edge of the box. She again displays good awareness, vision and agility to execute this move.
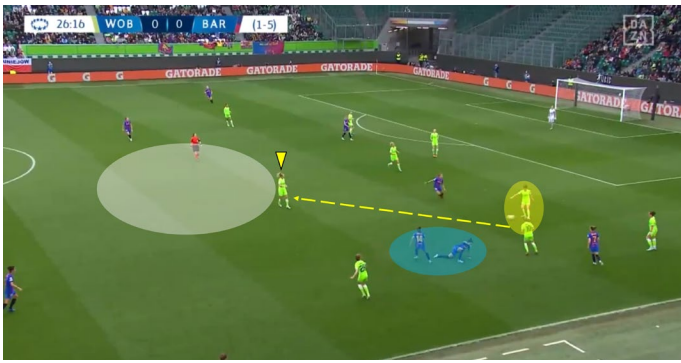

In this final analysis of Roord's attacking work, we see her operating in a deeper zone as she looks to get her team out of a well-executed press by Arsenal which limited Wolfsburg's options. While Arsenal's presence in the close area was high, there was space on the opposite flank being occupied by Roord's teammate at left-back; Roord quickly noticed this and directed a brilliantly executed long ball over to the left flank which allowed her team to turn a pressure situation into good possession with attacking potential and forced Arsenal to quickly retreat to their own half. This is a great display of passing range ability, composure and vision from Roord, something that will come in very useful as the Netherlands may have to adapt from game to game.
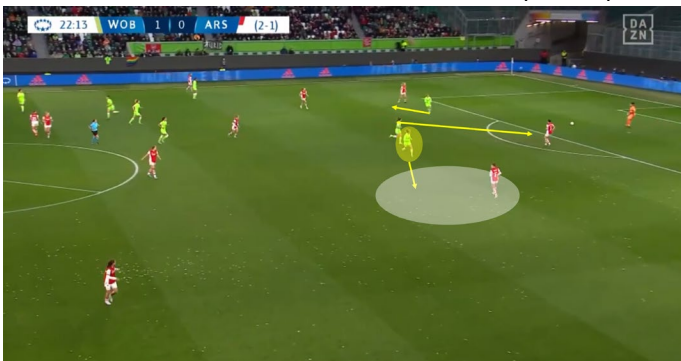
TRANSITIONS

Roord's work rate is another positive part of her game. She is constantly looking for the next pass, the next run — the next anything — to progress an attack. This helps her be well-prepared in the event of both attacking and defensive transitions, as we can see below.
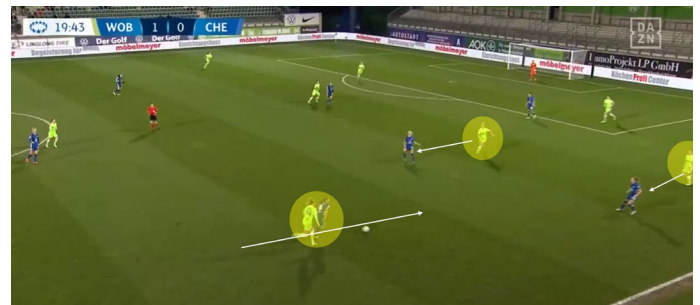
In this attacking transition, Roord is taking up a position in anticipation of her teammates stopping the Barca attack and regaining possession. Her positioning gives an immediate outlet for her teammate in possession — an outlet which can be reached instantly. From here, Roord has two options: 1. drive forward to spearhead an attack or 2. hold onto the ball to retain possession and allow her defensive and midfield teammates to gain yards up the pitch. She opted for the latter, and Wolfsburg were able to then control the ball higher up the pitch.

In terms of defensive transitions, Roord's actions will differ based on the location of the transition and her position on the pitch. If she is playing more of a central midfield role, she will often put the work in to assist her teammates in marking up the opposition. However, when she is undertaking a more attacking role, positioning is key as she looks to close off passing options along with her teammates. In the instance where the player she's marking still gets the ball, her defensive capabilities are more than enough to put the opponent under good pressure along with an effective tackle.

DEFENSIVE PHASE

Roord's role may hold more of an attacking responsibility than defensive, but her work off the ball has been important for Wolfsburg and she will want to transfer that into the national side this summer. The important difference, however, is where she will operate for the Netherlands compared to where she plays for Wolfsburg. For her club, she sometimes operates in a more attacking role which obviously impacts where her defensive actions take place. Below, we will look at a couple of examples of defensive contributions for Wolfsburg that will still be of use to her national side.

The image above shows a Chelsea counterpart receiving the ball while facing her own goal. She did receive the ball further up the pitch, but Roord's reaction and pressure forced her back deeper into her own half. Roord does this with good aggression and intensity without committing a foul, and her teammates marking opposition passing options combine well to make an all-around impressive pressing play. There will be fixtures this summer in which the Netherlands look to hurry the opponent on the ball and limit time & space in which to work, so pressing in this way will be very effective.
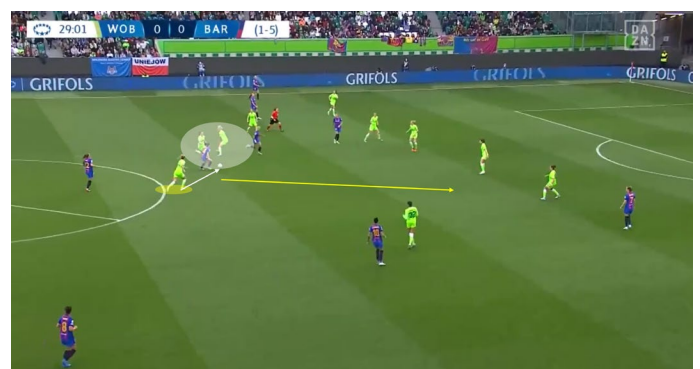
The example above again shows Roord dropping in from a higher position to offer defensive assistance. Her tactical knowledge and anticipation are on display in this analysis too; there are two Wolfsburg teammates applying pressure to the Barca player but both on the same side (location-wise) and without Roord's pressure, the Barca player on the ball would have the licence to drive forward into the attacking third. Instead, Roord quickly applies pressure with an effective challenge which in turn gets the ball back into Wolfsburg feet, and Roord provides support in the following phase of possession. It is clever defending from Roord as she uses the positioning of the two teammates in the highlighted area. As they are both pressing from the same side, the Barca player is left with just one choice as to where she will go next. This informs Roord's subsequent decision, and her tackle is well-timed.

PHYSICAL PROFILE

At 5'7, Roord is not relying on her physical presence to win her battles. Her strong level of aggressiveness and good strength help her in duels, while she also shows good signs of jumping ability, useful for aerial duels.

Her frame allows her to execute actions with good speed and reaction which often gives her the upper hand in individual duals. This combines well with her generally good pace and movement, and a low centre of gravity that helps her when running with the ball.

CONCLUSION

There are a good number of players that spectators will be interested in seeing at this year's Euros, and Jill Roord is certainly one of them. A dangerous player in attack with a good ability to link and progress play quickly and effectively, her record speaks for itself in terms of G/A but her data below that also supports her talent. Roord brings innovation, quality, and consistency to a team that will look to turn a few heads in this summer's tournament.

NETHERLANDS:

GROUP C

MARCEL SEIFEDDINE // @MarcelS_02

The defending European Champions, the Netherlands, will be looking to retain the trophy they worked so hard to win last time around. After losing out in the final of the Olympics to the USA, the Oranje will be fired up to not allow a repeat of the situation. A change in management means that Mark Parsons, a young English coach, will be looking to stand out on the big stage through the use of his tactics to guide a team full of stars to back-to-back European Championships. Holland are currently ranked fifth in the world and are the fourth-best team in Europe according to the most recent FIFA rankings; they will look to use that to help boost their self-belief to overcome any opposition. There is a feeling that this could be one of the last occasions wherein some of these legends get to represent their national teams, so they will want to finish off their careers on a high note.

Placed in a group with Portugal, Switzerland and Sweden, it certainly won't be easy for the Netherlands to win the group but they should be able to qualify as one of the top two. A team filled with Champions League winners, and domestic league winners will surely have the quality and ability to match these expectations and progress further in the competition.

PREDICTED STARTING XI

Mark Parsons will definitely opt for either a 4-3-3 or 4-2-3-1 system. Whilst the shape of the midfield isn't certain, most of the other positions of this experienced team will be. In goal, Sari van Veenendaal will certainly start every game. With 87 caps to her name, she is the captain of the side and has represented her country in the last 4 major tournaments. A great leader who already knows what it takes to lift this trophy, there is no reason to change something that has worked so great in recent history.

At right-back, Lynn Wilms is expected to take part in her first major tournament for her country. She has recently broken into the first

team at Wolfsburg and already has represented her country 18 times whilst still only being 21. You can expect her to be flying down the right flank, aiming to contribute to more goals for the team. Although there are other options like Casparij and Dijkstra for the role, they are both less experienced than Wilms and throwing them into the deep end may not be the best idea.

A centre-back pairing of Stefanie Van der Gragt and Aniek Nouwen is expected. Playing at Ajax and Chelsea respectively, both defenders have proven they have the quality to play at the highest levels in club football and have already partnered with each other on several occasions for the Oranje. Merel van Dongen will also be aiming to start, having already represented them 59 times, so don't be surprised to see her replace Nouwen.

Dominique Janssen is expected to start at left-back. She's played centre-back for club and country in the past, so the role of a left-back tucking in to form a back 3 will be perfect for her and the system.

At the base of the midfield 3, Jackie Groenen will be looking to get a spot at the base of the midfield. Sherida Spitse can also get this role but Parsons has been a fan of Groenen in the spell he has had there. Danielle van de Donk and Jill Roord will be looking to play in the two advanced midfield roles. They both have lots of creativity, ability to time runs into the box and will be perfect in the half-space. Spitse could easily come into any one of these midfield roles, especially seeing as she is the most capped player ever for the Leeuwinnen with 199 caps. Damaris Egurrola has just won the Champions League and with 2 goals in 2 caps, she will be looking to break out on the international stage.

There should be almost no debate about the front three, with Vivianne Miedema, Lieke Martens and Lineth Beerensteyn all being much

more experienced, and having had stronger campaigns than the other young and fresh players coming along as backup. Renate Jansen will probably come off the bench, but she will not be starting ahead of their key player, Miedema. Shanice van de Sanden will have a right to be frustrated about not getting selected, having been a regular member of the squad beforehand, gaining 95 caps in the process.


Netherlands Squad age profile
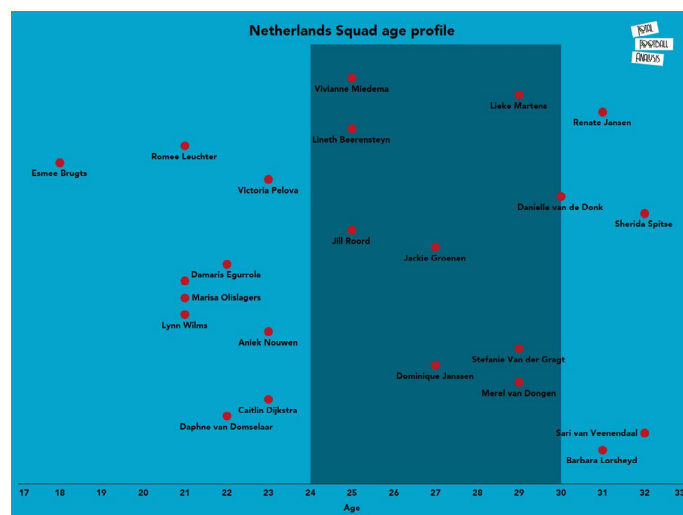
As seen in the graph above, 8 of the starting 11 will be in the peak of their careers at the time of this tournament. Added to that, a goalkeeper at the age of 32 — occupying a position where is it well known they often peak in later years, this squad is primed and ready to retain the trophy. This group of players have already won this trophy 5 years ago and reached the final of the World Cup to boot so there can be no doubts about their ability.

ATTACKING PHASE

Netherlands - In possession - Attacking
Women's Euro 2022
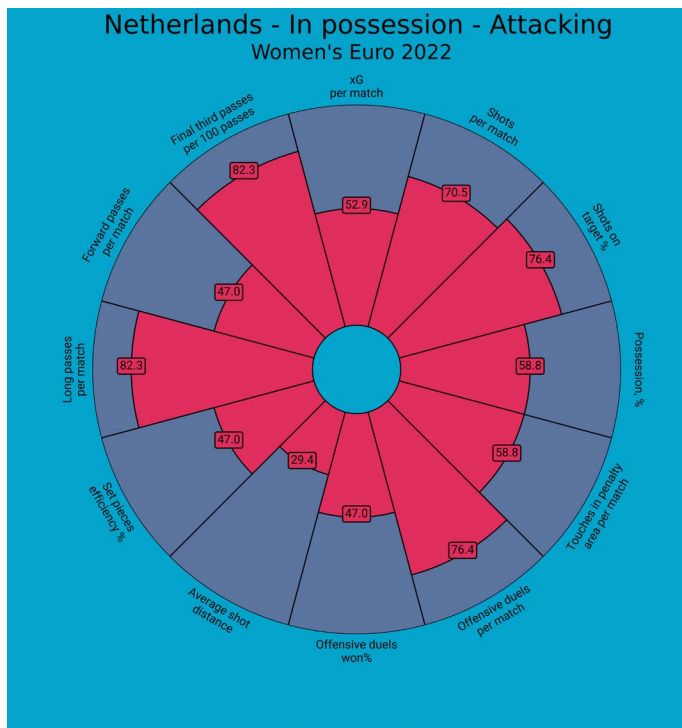
Holland's backline has the ability, as well as the arrogance, to allow opposition players to close them down before playing through them. As can be seen in the image, the Netherlands are numerically underloaded in the highlighted area but they have the ability to dribble past the opposition and play the ball to an open player, partly thanks due to a poor press from the Belgian team. One action has taken out 5 players from the game and created an artificial transition, where there is a 3v4 leaving the Dutch players lots of space to attack the ball with.
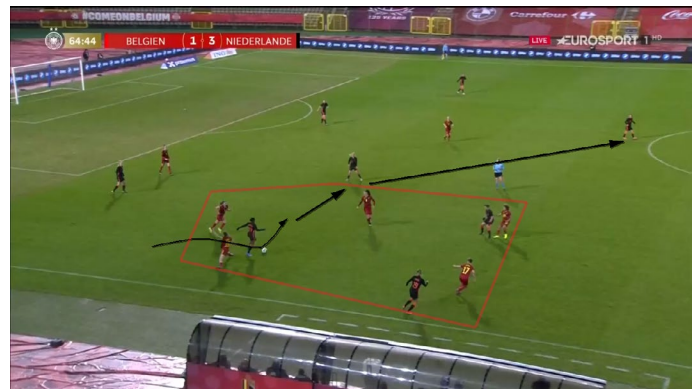
The arrival of a new manager in Mark Parsons has brought a new system of play to the Oranje. In the first phase of play, the Netherlands attempt to play out from the back with the goalkeeper. The two centre-backs split to either side of the keeper and always show for the ball. They keep a 4-1 shape in build-up with the other players further up the pitch waiting to receive the ball in pockets of space. The two wingers are positioned as high and wide as possible to stretch the opposition back line and pin the full-backs back, leaving more space for the Netherlands players in deeper areas. The lone dm is always available for a bounce pass to relieve a teammate of pressure. A common method of progression is for one of the two central defenders to play a line-breaking pass to a central midfielder who has run off of the shoulder of their marker into a pocket of space between the midfield and defensive lines. Receiving the ball on the back foot, they can then turn on the ball and drive at the back four with plenty of options on either side.

When the goalkeeper has the ball, she will often wait for attackers to close her down, to attract pressure which opens up gaps further up the pitch. Sari van Veenendaal has good distribution and she uses her ability to pick out a fullback. As shown in the image, the ball is flicked onto the left-winger, Martens, where there is a 3v2 allowing them to retain the ball. Danielle van de Donk then has lots of space to pick up the ball and drive with it towards the opposition goals whilst there are also 4 other runners giving an option and creating chaos. In this attack, the Netherlands had a 5v4 against Brazil, but due to a poor and selfish decision, the chance was wasted although the right-winger, Van de Sanden, was in acres of space.
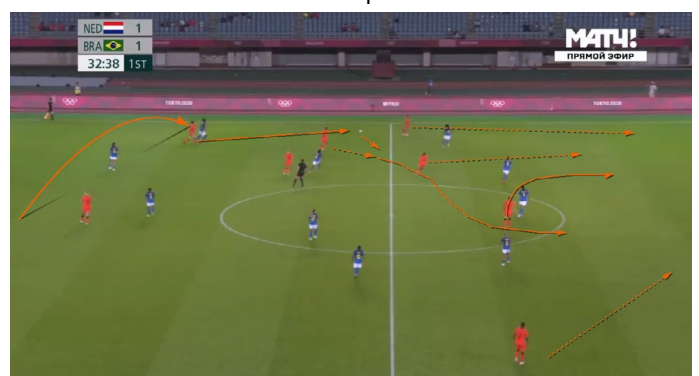
Vivianne Miedema also helps in build-up through the use of her physicality to hold the ball up if the goalkeeper needs to boot the ball long. The Netherlands rank in the 82nd percentile for long passes per 90, which is partly down to the long balls being played into Miedema, yet most are successful due to her superior ability in aerial duels, added with the quality distribution.

In settled attacks, Holland move into a 3-2-5 formation. Janssen will likely drop into a third centre-back role, a position she is very familiar with, while Lynn Wilms will move up the pitch, holding the width down the right side.

This will give the Netherlands a great positional structure, allowing them to have good combinations down the flanks to provide service for Miedema. This side likes to play the ball around the final third, being patient and looking for an opening, which is clear by their ranking in the 82nd percentile for final third passes per 100 passes. This means that most of the passes that they make are in and around the opposition box rather than playing about with the ball in slightly deeper areas.
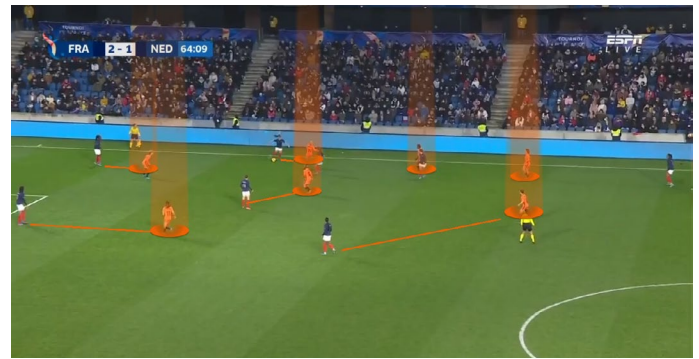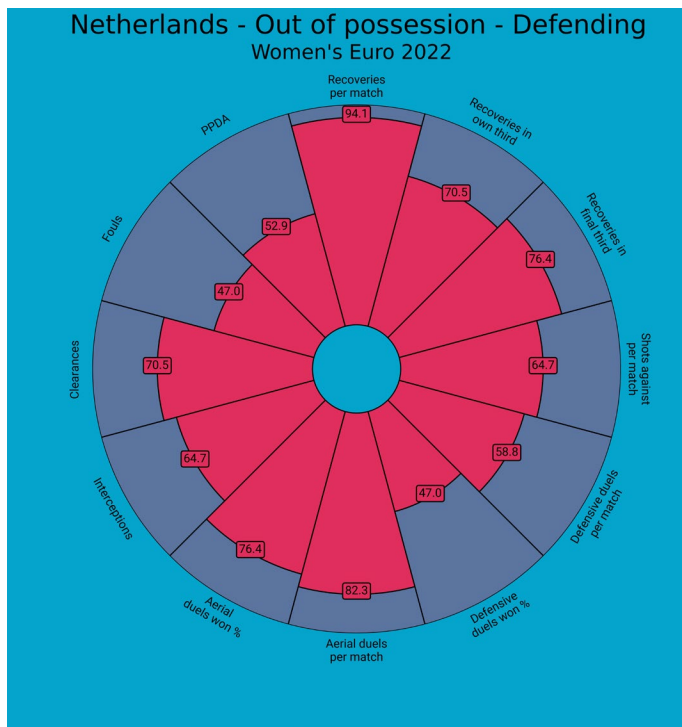
The Netherlands are brilliant at creating multiple goalscoring chances for Miedema, which is highlighted by her six-goal performance against Cyprus in the last international break. When the ball is in wide areas, Miedema is brilliant at showing for the ball and receiving it on the turn, rolling the opposition defender without letting them get a sight of the ball. The two 8's, Roord and van de Donk, will be roaming into the half-spaces and offering combinations with the

wingers and fullbacks to attempt to feed the ball into Miedema.

In the 3-2-5 system, quick switches of play allow a winger to be isolated in a 1v1 position high up the pitch. Martens and Beerensteyn are both excellent at taking on the defender through their changes of pace, bursts of speed and close dribbling ability. However, they can be slightly predictable with both preferring to go on their stronger foot, which for both is to go on the outside and cross the ball in rather than cutting inside. While at times predictable, this approach can be effective, as Miedema is strong in aerial duels and lots of crosses lead to her getting lots of headed chances on goal.

Another area in which the Netherlands can be devastating is set pieces. They have a good number of tall options to target in the box, which can cause chaos for the opposition. We have seen several short and long corner routines in their recent games, which have been innovative and hard to predict. Furthermore, the Dutch players can win headers and offer opportunities to win the second ball from long free-kick and corner situations. You can expect the Netherlands to create plenty of chances from set-piece situations as well as from open play.
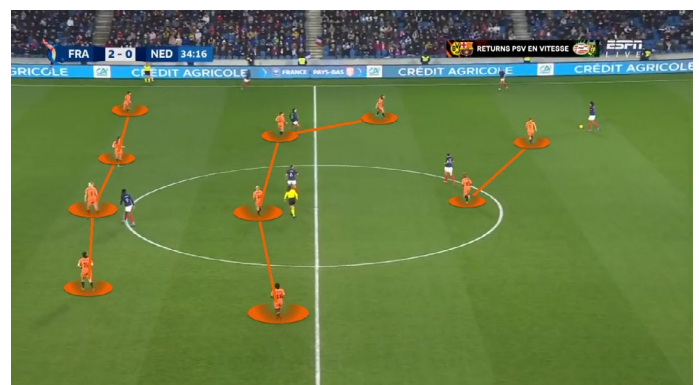
DEFENSIVE PHASE

Netherlands - Out of possession - Defending
Women's Euro 2022

Mark Parsons has also made the Netherlands a far braver team out of possession. As shown in the stats graphic above, the Netherlands rank in the 94th percentile for the number of recoveries per match. This means that they win the ball back far more often than most other teams due to a better pressing structure and a higher running rate than before.

The Leeuwinnen don't press high often, only really doing so in dead ball situations such as goal kicks or throw-ins, where the players have more time to step up and get tight to the player they should be marking. In these situations, they will go for a man-to-man approach, attempting to win the ball back in a dangerous situation that could lead to a goal-scoring situation as seen pictured below. The throw-in taker didn't have many options and the ball is cleared into the back of a Dutch player.

Parsons has implemented a 4-4-2 mid-block in contrast to the 4-1-4-1 they had been using previously. This is done through one of the 8's moving up in line with Miedema when they are out of possession. The change in formation means that the middle of the pitch is slightly more exposed should the opposition infiltrate this area. However, the two front players make it difficult for the opponents to pass the ball into the middle of the pitch and have to find ways around the block. The pivot of the opposition is always covered by one of the front two players, whilst the other presses the ball. This ensures that the opposition are forced to turn to either flank of the pitch, where the number of passing options is always lesser than if you had the ball in the middle of the pitch. To make up for the reduced player in the midfield line, Parsons has done well to increase the vertical compactness of the lines, meaning that the players in the holes between the lines won't have much time to receive the ball before being pressured by a defending player. This has led to them winning the ball back in higher areas than before and reducing the number of chances the opposition get per game, although when they do break through, those chances are generally more clear-cut than before.

A flaw that the Netherlands do have, is that as a result of a more attacking team, the defensive positioning and discipline are reduced. As seen in the next picture, those attacking-minded midfielders are sometimes not aggressive or proactive enough, which gives the opposition lots of time to pick out the perfect pass into a dangerous area. They can be caught too far up the pitch, trying to make an impact offensively and not respecting that there aren't enough players back to deal with potential counter-attacking opportunities.
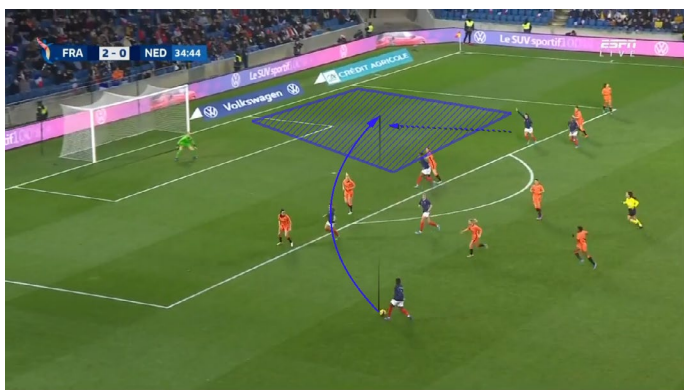

The Netherlands are also very comfortable dealing with long balls, which could be coming in due to pressure from the front line. They rank in the 82nd percentile for aerial duels per match and in the 76th percentile for aerials duels won %. However, the Dutch players are vulnerable in 1v1 situations where they only lie in the 47th percentile for defensive duels won %. This means that they are weaker than most teams in defending and making tackles when the ball is on the floor. This will be an area other teams target and one in which the Netherlands must improve if they are to retain their trophy.

TRANSITION

The Netherlands will be arguably one of the most dangerous teams in transitional situations thanks to the duo of Martens and Beerensteyn who are both incredibly quick, carry the ball over long distances and have the perfect teammate waiting to receive the ball and finish it off.

This team opts for a very direct approach in attacking transitions. They will usually attempt a long ball into the channel from a central defender in behind for one of the wingers to chase. If the distance is too large, Miedema will drop off and try to receive the ball to feet before playing a through ball in the channel. This is a very effective method of creating chances for them, due to the lightning pace they possess which allows them to easily carry the ball into dangerous situations outside the box. However, these wide players like Beerensteyn sometimes lack the decision-making or end product to correctly finish off these fluid moves.
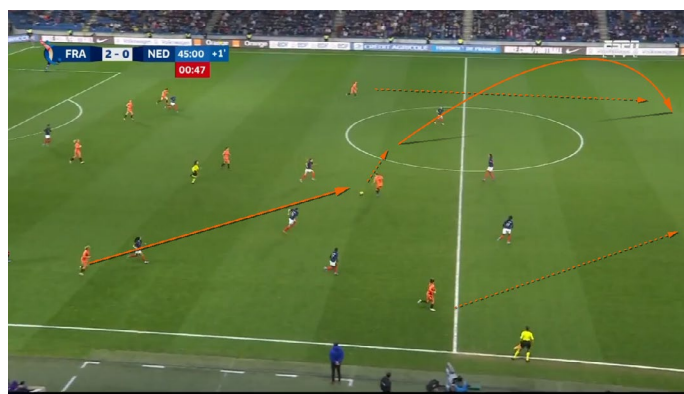
In defensive transitions, Parsons has asked his players to counter-press the opposition, thus not allowing them to attack an unorganised and outnumbered defence that they expose themselves with during settled attacks. As shown in the image, the players surrounding the ball when possession is lost, quickly move to prevent the opponent from progressing the ball forwards. When they force the player to turn back to their own goal, it gives the other teammates time to recover back into their own position for them to get back into their own solid mid-block shape.
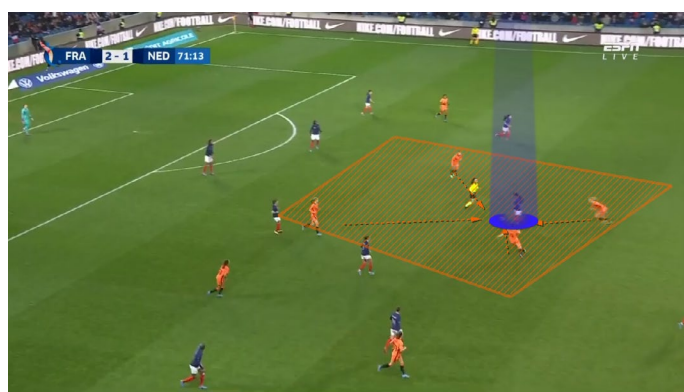
Yet again, perhaps due to the coach being quite new to the role, the Netherlands defenders are too slow and not aggressive enough to step into the opposition players before they receive the ball. In this image, the defender sprints at the ball only when the ball has already arrived at the French forward's feet, meaning she has time to control the ball and turn, allowing her to easily dribble past the defender who has rushed out too late. Although that example did not prove costly, the Dutch defenders can't afford to be so slow as it will continually leave the goalkeeper exposed to 1v1 situations in the long term.
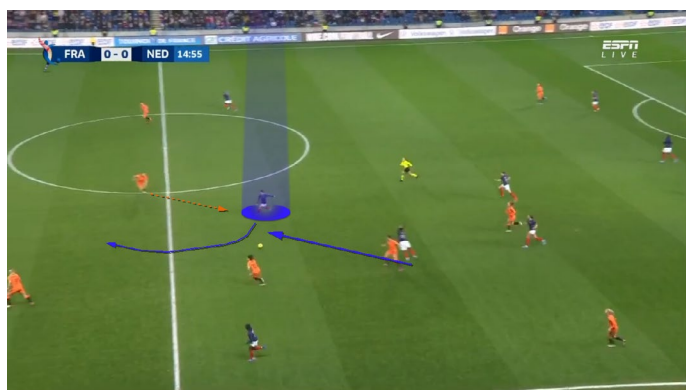
DEFENDERS

Lynn Wilms has enjoyed a breakout season at Wolfsburg from the right-back position, producing exceptional performances when she was trusted in big games against Europe's elites in the Champions League. Aniek Nouwen will have great confidence after helping Chelsea win the Super League and the FA Cup while Dominique Janssen will look to carry on her form with Wolfsburg and carry on the full-back pairing with Wilms. Merel van Dongen is an experienced and important player in the squad, making 59 appearances for the Oranje in 7 years. She will be battling to retain her place ahead of Nouwen after having a less successful season, whilst Stefanie van der Gragt has always been preferred by head coach Mark Parsons. Van Dongen will be an excellent back up option for both the centre back position and also at left back, where she would work well when inverting to a back 3 in possession.

The youthful trio of Kerstin Casparij, Caitlin Dijkstra and Marisa Olislagers have all enjoyed a successful season with Twente, where they won the women's Eredivisie. All three were key players, having between 22-24 appearances each in the campaign and while Dijkstra will be available to cover anywhere across the back four, Casparij and Olislagers will be cover for the full back positions. If they want to break into the starting XI, they will have to prove their ability at a higher level as Twente didn't make it far in Europe, and the teams will be more difficult at the Euro's than what these players would face in the Eredivisie Women.

MIDFIELDERS

The midfield trio that Holland possess is arguably one of the strongest in the tournament, with Spitse being an ever-present in the side in the past. She missed the Olympics with an injury which could arguably be one of the reasons they could not beat the USA in the final. Danielle van de Donk hasn't had a great deal of game time at Lyon since joining but the record with her national team will give Parsons enough reason to keep her in the team. Jill Roord has had a fairly quiet season for Wolfsburg in the European scene in terms of trophies, but she still managed to average a goal every 2 games in the Champions League this season and scored 10 goals in 20 starts in the Bundesliga. Jackie Groenen has had a solid season with Manchester United, starting half of the games in the season in a holding role. There will be a rivalry for the deeper spot with Spitse.

Victoria Pelova has enjoyed a good individual season at Ajax with 6 goals and 9 assists across the season but, yet again, she will need to prove her ability at a higher level if she is to take a starting spot from Roord or van de Donk. Damaris Egurrola is breaking through into the Lyon team, appearing in 14 of the 22 matches Lyon had

been a part of. Egurrola has a bright future but she will be slowly eased into the national team, so it is unlikely that she starts many matches in the tournament.

FORWARDS

The front line of the Netherlands is certainly a strong point. Miedema finished her season with Arsenal with 19 goals in 30 games, while she already has 7 goals in 4 games for the national team. Lieke Martens has just won the Primera División once again with Barcelona and scored 23 times in 32 games. She has averaged a goal contribution every 44 minutes in the league and this kind of form will help guide the Oranje to another final. Lineth Beerensteyn has just come second in the Frauen-Bundesliga with Bayern Munich and only managed 2 goals in the league. She will need to improve her performances or she will likely be dropped from the starting line ups. This front three have all been exposed to varying levels of success and this should only continue at international level.

Romee Leuchter enjoyed a great season at Ajax with 25 goals in 23 starts, but it is unlucky for her that she is competing for a spot with Miedema who is performing exceptionally at the highest levels. Renate Jansen managed 29 goal contributions in 22 starts for Twente whilst winning the league and she will definitely be in Parsons' mind as to whether she should replace Beerensteyn. Esmee Brugts is only 18, and while she has regularly played for PSV, the step up from a poorer division to international football in such a short space of time will mean that her minutes will be appropriately managed.

BEST PERFORMER

One player that everyone watching the Euros will need to keep an eye on, is Vivianne Miedema. As the top goal scorer in the history of the Women's Super League and the top scorer of the Dutch national team, there is no debate about the wonderful finishing quality that Miedema possesses.

These metrics above, breaking down her domestic performances for the last calendar year and comparing her statistics in each noted area with the league median, show that she is a complete forward, not just one who only waits around in the box for chances to appear. As well as being a clinical finisher, Miedema can create chances through her great dribbling and passing abilities, which are highlighted in the stats above. She is a strong, quick athletic player who is also quite tall compared to other strikers. She has the physical prowess to fight for and win aerial duels, hold the ball up and roll her defender. That is also coupled with a great ability to control the ball both with her chest and feet, where she can take the ball down into her stride and finish the ball in one fluid motion.

Miedema also can strike the ball from range, scoring a few goals for the national team by driving it into the corner from range. Adding to that is intelligent movement and positioning in the box to find space in great areas whilst also losing her marker. In addition to her great on-

the-ball quality, Miedema also works hard for the team, often leading the press and also coming back to defend set-pieces with her aerial ability.

Vivianne Miedema will almost certainly be in the race for the golden boot, and she is one name that every team will fear coming up against.

TOURNAMENT PREDICTION

The Netherlands will have to be on top of their game from the first day when they face Sweden. A slip-up against Sweden could leave them in second place and this could lead to a possible quarter-final match against France who are also one of the favourites. Nevertheless, the Dutch national team definitely has the individual quality to beat any team on their day, although their style of play in going long to find Miedema could fall apart if a quality player like Wendie Renard marks her tight and doesn't allow her to turn with the ball.

However, a team full of players at the peak of their careers is one that is definitely set up to reach the final and should be playing to win the European Championship on the final day.

PORTUGAL:

GROUP C

13 April 2021 was a painful day for the Portuguese.

As the final whistle blew at the Sapsan Arena in Moscow, A Selecção das Quinas collapsed to the ground, lamenting their 1-0 aggregate defeat to Russia in the Euro 2022 playoffs. Qualifying was finished and Portugal were on their way home.

Now fast-forward to 2 May 2022.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine left football's governing bodies with no choice. Russian teams would not compete in tournament play. As the team that had been drawn against Russia in the playoffs, Portugal would receive the invitation to Euro 2022.

The unexpected invitation leaves Portugal with little time to prepare while also limiting their opponents' preparations. Even despite the late arrival, manager Francisco Neto was among the first to submit his official tournament roster. There's little mystery within the Portuguese camp as to which players will play which roles. Neto is well-prepared internally, leaving him with more time for opposition analysis reports.

Placed in a difficult group with #2 Sweden, #5 Netherlands and #19 Switzerland, the 29th ranked Portuguese are the minnows in the group, but that's not to say they won't be competitive. At February's Algarve Cup, Portugal defeated #11 Norway 2-0. A 4-0 defeat to Sweden followed, but the match against a very good Norwegian team instilled a sense of belief in the Portuguese. A good run of form in World Cup qualifying, with five wins and two losses to Germany since 19 September 2021.

Portugal is nearing peak form heading into the Euros. While they are the underdog in the group, this tactical analysis will show why they will be a difficult out. Data analysis and scout reports will factor in as well as we discover this largely domestic Portuguese team.

PREDICTED STARTING XI
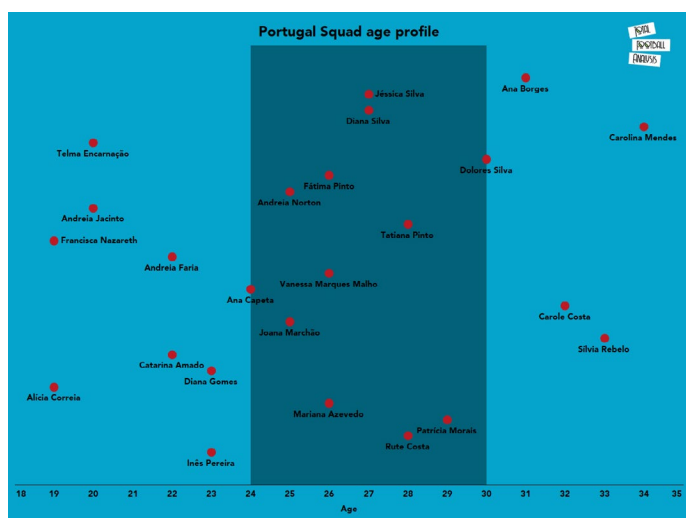
Portugal's typical formation is a 4-3-3, using the wingers for width and height while isolating them for 1v1 duels. When the Portuguese expect

to dominate possession and dictate tempo, the 4-3-3 is the go-to system.

Pereira, one of two players plying their trade outside of Portugal, will start in goal. The Servette goalkeeper stands at 168cm and is a very quick player. Her reflex saves and ability to cover low shots have been key to Portugal in Euro and World Cup qualifying. If Portugal is to make it out of this difficult group, she will have to shine in goal. Managing crosses, especially from set-pieces, will be key. Portugal struggled to deal with Sweden's corners in the Algarve Cup, conceding three out of four goals on set pieces. If revenge is in the cards, Pereira will have to dominate aerial duels.

Benfica standout centre-back, Costa, will anchor the backline. Her club teammate, Rebelo is likeliest to start beside her, though Neto has shown some flexibility with the second centre-back spot. Costa is a permanent fixture, so it's her partner that could see rotation. Diana Gomes is the other player likely to feature next to Costa, giving Portugal another weapon on set pieces. Rebelo has received more minutes recently, making her the favourite, but Gomes' form in World Cup qualifying can't be ignored, especially with her aerial presence on set pieces.

Moving to the wings, Amado is a shoo-in on the right while Marchão, the Sporting CP star, should see the bulk of the minutes at left-back. Of the two, Marchão is the more attack-oriented while Amado takes on more of a stay-at-home role. She will venture forward as well, but Marchão certainly takes up the higher starting positions and spearheads the Portuguese attack on the left.

Midfield is where we'll see the most rotation and positional variability. All three players we have tabbed to start can play the #6. When Portugal played Sweden in the Algarve Cup, Dolores Silva played at the base of midfield while T. Pinto

played right-centre and F.Pinto operated as the left-centre mid.

Norton will likely feature in each match. She's a frequent starter and will typically sub into the game if she started on the bench. Faria and Nazareth should see the pitch as well, though most likely from the bench and Malho's height and box presence is another intriguing rotational option.

Up top, it's Borges and the Silvas who will see the majority of the starts and minutes. Mendes will factor into the equation too, but she has become more of an option off the bench rather than a starter. Expect the other three, all of whom are in their primes, to lead the team up top. The former Aston Villa player, D. Silva, enjoyed an excellent season with Sporting CP, scoring 16 goals. Her influence will be crucial for Portugal.

Encarnação is the last forward on the team, but the 20-year-old was exceptional for Maritimo, scoring 15 goals, so there is depth up top for Portugal.

Looking ahead to Euro 2022, possession dominance is unlikely given the difficult group they've been handed. Stronger, possession-dominant opposition generally leads the Portuguese to adapt. When the system changes, protecting against stronger opposition, the likeliest formation is a 4-4-2 with a diamond midfield. The 3-5-2 and 4-2-3-1 have also been deployed, but a 4-4-2 is the preference. Given the quality of Portugal's opponents, there's a very high possibility we will see one of these systems employed.

Neto's midfield will see rotation, but he does like to keep his front three intact. When Portugal switches to one of their secondary formations, Borges and J. Silva can play as a front two while D. Silva drops to the top of the midfield diamond.

ATTACKING PHASE

Portugal - In possession - Attacking
**Women's Euro 2022**
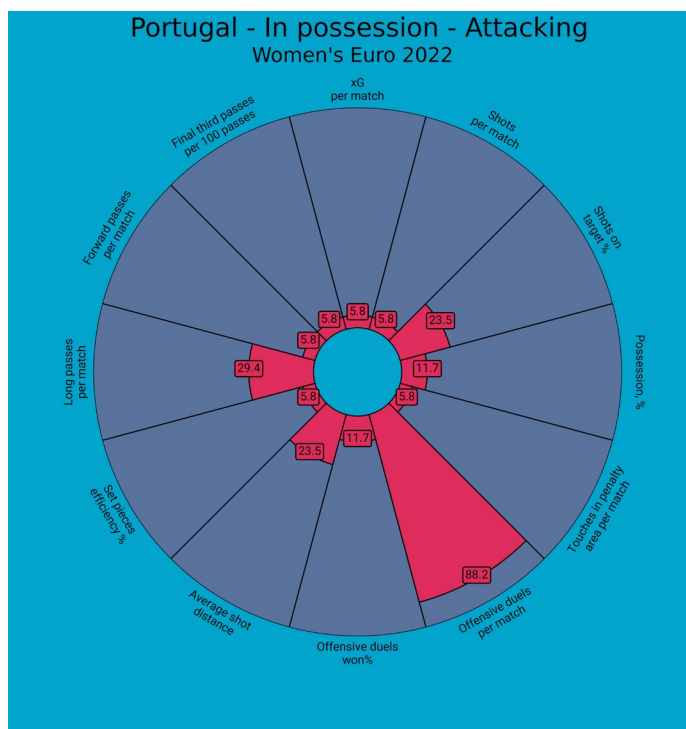
Scoring just 10 goals in eight qualifying matches, the attacking execution was certainly lacking, which is plain to see through our pie chart. Based on percentile rank relative to the other UEFA nations in the past year, Portugal's one standout category was their offensive duels per match, rating in the 89th percentile. Pair that stat with their 12th percentile offensive duels won percentage and you see the depth of their attacking tactics issues.

Fortunately for the Portuguese, they have turned the corner in World Cup qualifying, which they have nearly completed. Through eight games (of 10 total), they have 20 goals against arguably better competition. Even better, those goals have come from nine different players. Diana Silva, Mendes, C. Costa and Gomes lead the way with three goals apiece. Borges and J. Silva have added a playmaking spark on the wings as true wingers, creating from their central teammates.

Costa and Gomes are centre-backs, which highlights Portugal's improved set-piece tactics.

Mendes scored all of her goals against Israel, but she's a reliable presence off the bench.

When Portugal is in possession, the key things to look for are outlets to their forwards. The two Silvas will play a big part in Portugal's attacking success. Both players have tremendous pace and are clever enough to turn on overly aggressive defenders. To set up those passes, Portugal will play from the back so long as the odds of losing the ball are moderate to low. In order to progress, they'll look to get a midfielder into a forward-facing position. That cue signals the time to play forward.
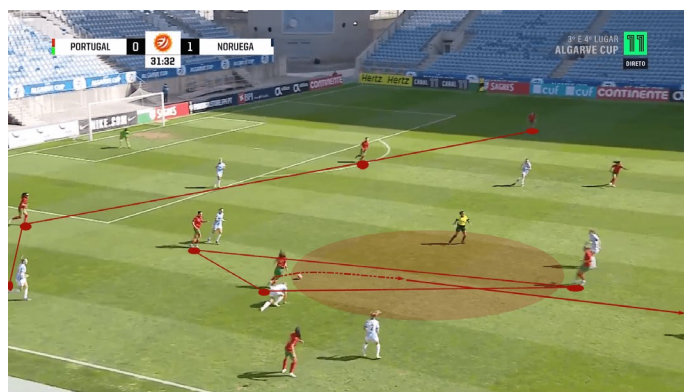
If the first look forward isn't good enough, they do show good patience to make the extra pass, as we see in the second tactical image. If the two wingers invert (one of the two typically will), then Portugal has an additional body in the centre of the pitch to facilitate that through pass.
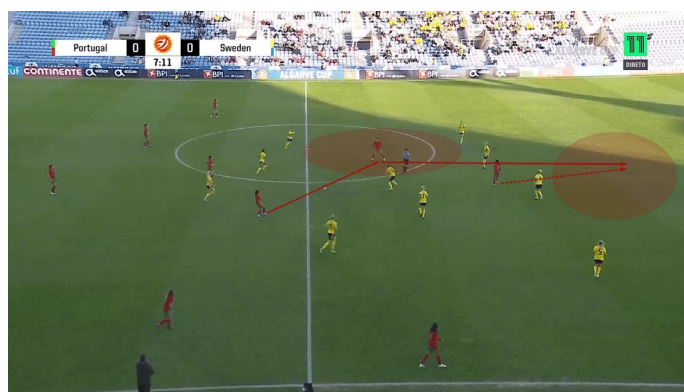
When the midfielders get into those positions, the Portuguese front line will engage. The Silvas especially will look to offer runs in behind. Borges prefers the ball played to her feet, so balls played into her give Portugal the unpredictability they need once they progress into the final third.

As Portugal enters the final third, they often look for box entry through the wing with a cutback cross to the penalty spot. Their forwards are often overshadowed by big centre-backs, so service on the ground against less mobile backs suites the Portuguese.

Depending on their midfield grouping or if Mendes is in the game, Portugal may have the size to contest crosses, but that's a big if. In World Cup qualifying, late runs into the box were often the most successful movements in crossing scenarios.

Portugal's attack will be challenged by the quality of the opposition in their group, but the plan is very clearly to limit goal-scoring chances and take the limited opportunities they'll have. They're the group underdogs who will live the underdog's tale.

DEFENSIVE PHASE

Portugal - Out of possession - Defending
Women's Euro 2022
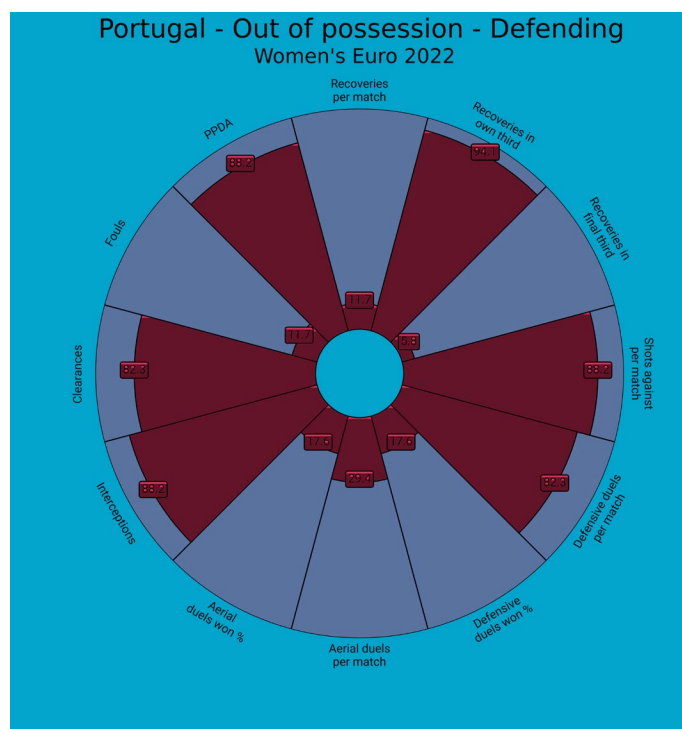
If Portugal fights their way through the group stage, it will be down to their defensive efforts. Conceding just twice in those eight Euro qualifying games, the Iberians are well structured and very aggressive. Portugal's PPDA was among the best in Europe during the qualifying stages. Rating in the 89th percentile in interceptions and shots against per match, they are a team that recovers ground well, getting pressure on the first attacker and numbers behind the ball.

Since A Selecção das Quinas will go into each match as the underdog, expect them to drop into a mid-block, prioritizing numbers behind the ball. They funnel play through to the wings fairly well but can get caught allowing opponents to re-entre the central channel before play progresses into the box.

Furthermore, Portugal must be prepared for the diversity of attacking styles they will face. Switzerland are a possession-dominant side, Sweden will look to play into their big targets and the Netherlands cleverly create optimal

attacking situations for their star players. It's a challenging scenario that will test Portugal's versatility, organization and squad depth.

From the 4-3-3, Portugal can either stick with the system in defence or shift to a 4-4-2. Without changing starting personnel, one of the forwards can simply drop into a #10 role to match up against the opposition's #6.

In the first tactical image, we see that Portugal's first two lines of the press are often flat. Opponents can get between the lines, which is an issue, but the Portuguese do recover very well.
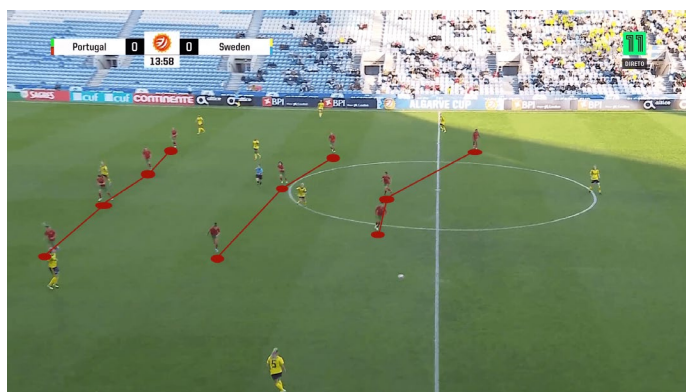
As Portugal drops into their defensive third, that 4-3-3 often becomes a 4-1-4-1, especially against top opposition. The two wide forwards will drop deeper will the team keeps either of the Silvas up top.

Neto's squad does look to funnel opponents into the wings, then seal them in. Once the opponent plays into the wings, Portugal collapses quickly and pressures aggressively. For the most part, this is an area of strength. From a team perspective, they're very well organised.

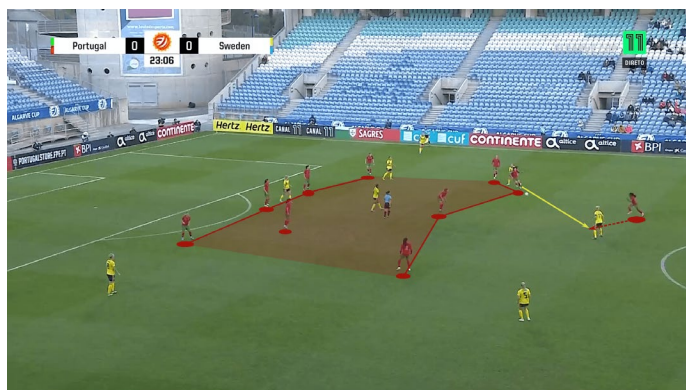When there is a breakdown, it usually comes from an individual error, especially from over-pursuit. This will make or break the Portuguese. Limiting breakdowns from mental miscues should keep them in games.
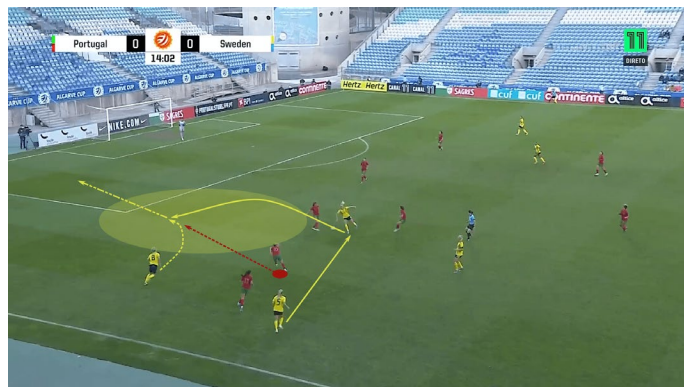
One thing you won't see is Portugal giving up after a miscue. They will hustle and cover for each other. Their organisation and team spirit will keep them closely connected to offer assistance when a teammate is beaten. Commitment, hustle and intensity are unquestionable within this group. Will it be enough? Time will tell.

TRANSITIONS

Mastering transitional moments will be key for Portugal. Given the teams in their group, the Portuguese will likely prioritize organisation in open play, and then take their opportunities in transition. They will have to ensure they're prepared to deal with opposition counterattacks, limiting those opportunities. With Portugal playing more conservatively, the outside-backs are unlikely to spend much of the game in high and wide positions. Maintaining tactical discipline is paramount to Portugal's success.

From a defensive transition standpoint, Portugal will have to ensure their midfield does not over-commit near the ball. If they can avoid becoming unbalanced, they'll give their back line the protection they need.
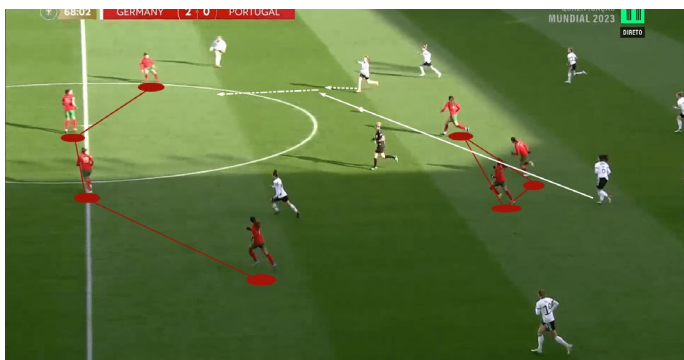
Fortunately, when Portugal does concede space in transition, they are very quick to recover. In the first tactical image, we see an unbalanced Portuguese midfield. Even though Germany has space to attack and can run at the back line, Portugal is quick to get seven players behind the ball. Their mentality is fantastic and they'll have to show that same level of aggression and intensity through the three games.

In attack, their recoveries will likely come from deeper positions. The mid-block should produce some counterattacking opportunities starting near midfield, but Portugal does tend to recover the ball against top opposition deeper in their own half.

Recoveries from the low block will likely target one of the attacking midfielders or wingers. From the match against Germany, Portugal breaks the first line of the press and has space to run into. This is one of their strengths in transition. After a recovery, they show a good sense of awareness of who the outlets are and manage to play into them rather efficiently.

Transitions off of set pieces can be a threat too. One thing to watch in this tournament is the way the Portuguese move immediately after a set-piece. If a clearance or goalkeeper grab occur, Portugal will send two or three players streaking up the pitch.
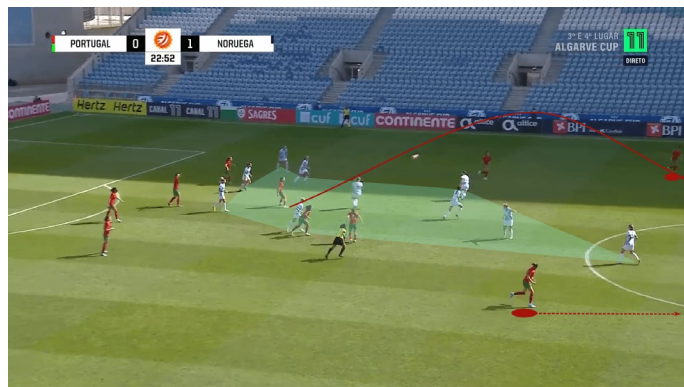
They had some success setting up attacking transitions from set-pieces against Norway, a top women's side. Look for them to use similar tactics at Euro 2022.

FORWARDS

Portugal's forwards have a massive task ahead of them. With the team likely to sit deeper to limit opposition scoring opportunities, the forwards will have to produce that little bit of magic to get the Portuguese goals. Diana Silva will be the primary target up top. With 16 goals in league play, she exceed her xG of 12 and produced 19 key passes.

J. Silva is expected to start, along with Borges, who can also play outside-back. The former added five league goals, the latter two, so the goal-scoring burden will likely fall on D. Silva.

Should Portugal need a goal near the end of the game, Mendes has been in decent form during limited World Cup qualifying playing time and Encarnação is coming off a 15-goal league season. At 20 years old, she has the making of a breakout star. Opportunities with the national team have been limited thus far, but she's someone who can provide a spark off the bench.

MIDFIELDERS

The Pintos give Portugal a nice blend of defensive muscle plus attacking creativity. Between them and D. Silva, the Portuguese midfield averaged a robust 86% passing success rate in league play. With their defensive capabilities and smooth technical play, the Portuguese midfield is arguably the team's strength.

Looking beyond the starters, there is plenty of quality on the bench. Should Neto decide on heavy rotations, picking his starting XI based on his analysis of the opposition's tactics, he has the depth to do so. Nazareth is a dynamo in the final third, registering 10 goals, eight assists and 31 key passes in league play.

Capeta can add some width and dangerous crosses (47% in the league) and there are three Andreias to choose from, all quality in possession. Malho has a knack for goal as well (seven in the league), so Neto has the resources to fit his midfield to the opposition.
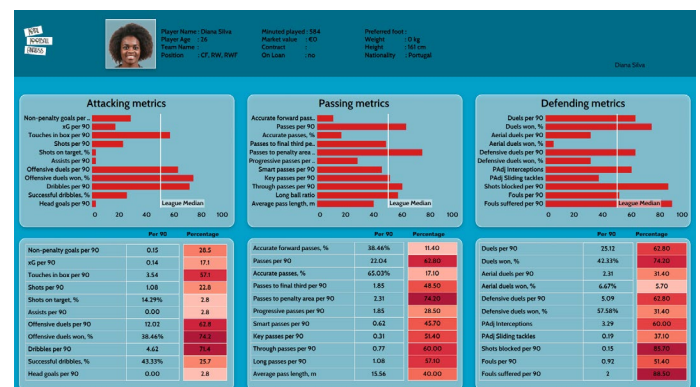
DEFENDERS

Keeping the opposition off the scoreboard, thus limiting the number of goals Portugal needs, is key to their tournament success. The backline will have their hands full, but they have the experience, quality and commitment to keep Portugal in matches.

Costa is the leader at the back. The Benfica centre-back rarely loses the ball and makes it difficult for opponents to play into her mark. Statistically, she's far from the team lead in tackles, interceptions and free ball pickups. Film analysis shows that it's not a case of lack of involvement. Rather, she makes it very difficult for her mark

to participate in the play, so she does excellent work before the ball arrives. Rebelo could join her club teammate, but Gomes is another strong option. Azevedo will likely add depth at the tournament.

Out wide, Marchão is the team's top attacking outside-back. With six goals and three assists in league play, as well as a respectable 30% cross accuracy rate, she's the likelier of the two starters to push higher. Amado is the likely starter on the right. She's a complete player who will give Portugal the defensive presence they need with some attacking upside. Correia and Borges (the projected starting forward) could factor in at outside-back as well.

BEST PERFORMER

Player Name : Diana Silva		Minutes played : 584		Preferred foot :	
Player Age : 26		Market value : €0		Weight : 0 kg	
Team Name :		Contract :		Height : 167 cm	
Position : CF, RW, RWF		On Loan : no		Nationality : Portugal	

Attacking metrics	Per 90	Percentage	Passing metrics	Per 90	Percentage	Defending metrics	Per 90	Percentage
Non-penalty goals per 90	0.15	28.5	Accurate forward passes, %	38.46%	11.40	Duels per 90	23.12	62.80
xG per 90	0.14	17.1	Passes per 90	22.04	62.80	Duels won, %	42.33%	74.20
Touches in box per 90	3.54	57.1	Accurate passes, %	65.03%	17.10	Aerial duels per 90	6.67%	5.70
Shots per 90	1.08	22.8	Passes to final third per 90	1.85	48.50	Aerial duels won, %	6.67%	5.70
Shots on target, %	14.29%	2.8	Passes to penalty area per 90	2.31	74.20	Defensive duels per 90	5.09	62.80
Assists per 90	0.00	2.8	Progressive passes per 90	1.85	28.50	Defensive duels won, %	57.58%	31.40
Offensive duels per 90	12.03	63.8	Smart passes per 90	0.62	45.70	PAdj Interceptions	3.29	60.00
Offensive duels won, %	38.46%	74.2	Key passes per 90	0.31	51.40	PAdj Sliding tackles	0.19	37.10
Dribbles per 90	4.62	71.4	Through passes per 90	0.77	60.00	Shots blocked per 90	0.15	85.70
Successful dribbles, %	43.33%	15.7	Long passes per 90	1.08	57.10	Fouls per 90	0.92	51.40
Head goals per 90	0.00	2.8	Average pass length, m	15.56	40.00	Fouls suffered per 90	2	44.50

After a disappointing season at Aston Villa, Silva returned to the Portuguese league with Sporting, putting in an excellent campaign. Having traded matches in the FAWSL against Chelsea and Arsenal for consistent playing time in her homeland, Silva has returned to form, finishing second in goals scored last season. Since Portugal's wide forwards are more traditional wing playmakers, the scoring burden will fall on Silva.

While she struggled to find the net in England, her 16 goals in 20 Campeonato Nacional Feminino games give cause for hope. She will find her way into the box, especially with her dribbling ability and Portugal's counterattacking style. Plus, her

defensive contribution is excellent. Silva has the ability to create her own chances simply through her work rate in the press.

For Portugal to have a good showing at the Euros, she will have to play a major role in the goals, either as the scorer or via her playmaking ability.

TOURNAMENT PREDICTION

Participating in Euro 2022 comes as a surprise for the Portuguese. Getting into the tournament based on Russian sanctions, the Iberians enter the tournament playing with house money. They simply weren't supposed to be here.

However, that won't be enough for this football-crazed nation.

Finding their way into the knockout rounds for the first time in their history would be a tremendous accomplishment for this emerging squad, but the minimum expectation is to be competitive in the tournament. Stealing a result or two would be a nice bonus. Starting well is a priority, especially since the first game is against Switzerland — the third-rated team in the group.

Should Portugal put in a good showing in their second consecutive European championship (and second overall), it will be viewed as a building block for the future, ideally leading to a first World Cup appearance.

SWEDEN:

GROUP C

MAK PAKHEI // @MakPakhei

Since March 2020, the Sweden women's national team have gone undefeated, keeping very strong form in several competitions, including the Algarve Cup and Women's World Cup Qualification, smashing opponents such as Portugal by 3-0 and even managing to put 15 past Georgia recently. They have certainly been one of the best in Europe of late and as a result, have eyes on the trophy with a mature squad. However, a big disappointment came in the Olympics final as they lost to Canada in the penalty shootout. That's why the players should have extra motivation to win the UEFA Women's EURO 2022 this summer.

In Group B, Sweden would face one of their biggest contenders — the Netherlands, alongside Switzerland and Portugal.

PREDICTED STARTING XI

The coach of Sweden, Peter Gerhardsson, built experiences at Hammarby and Vasalunds as a player, while he also managed BK Häcken in Allsvenskan for many years. Therefore, he is a very typical Swedish coach who likes his team to play in a 4-4-2 formation in general, sometimes changing to a 4-2-3-1 but with the same ways of playing.

In Sweden's lineup, some key players, such as Magdalena Eriksson of Chelsea, Filippa Angeldahl of Man City, or the partnership between Barcelona striker Fridolina Rolfö and Juventus' Lina Hurtig, were quite undroppable. While Gerhardsson still had plenty of options on the flanks, he could choose his wingers between Olivia Schough, Johanna Rytting-Kaneryd, or even Sofia Jakobsson and Rebecka Blomqvist, depending on the situation.

As easily noticed in the trend of Sweden's squad age profile, they have a very mature squad with most of the key players in the peak of their careers, including the centre-back partnership of Eriksson and Amanda Ilestedt.

Sweden also possess a lot of experienced players, such as captain Caroline Seger, indicating they aren't lacking leaders in the locker room. Meanwhile, the goalkeeper could also lead the backline as Hedvig Lindahl has 187 caps for her country and will surely be a calming presence to give confidence to the players around her.

ATTACKING PHASE

Sweden - In possession - Attacking
Women's Euro 2022

We get a good picture of Sweden's playing style from this chart. Clearly, they try to play on the front foot and frequently enter the final third, as their percentile ranks 88.2 at final third passes. Also, they are very direct and try to hit the opponent as soon as possible with a high long pass percentile of 76.4. We could also see their possession percentile, 29.4, is low, but they maintain a decent if not uninspiring xG and shots per match at 47.0 and 52.9, suggesting they can create some chances. One part to be noticed is their set-plays, as their percentile ranks 64.7, suggesting Sweden are quite comfortable in attacking corners and free-kicks to create chances as well.
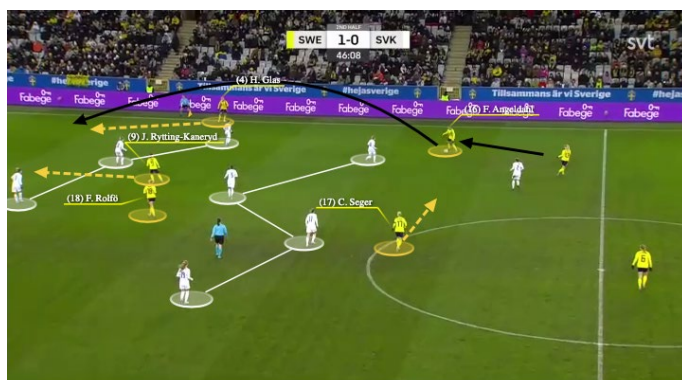
With the ball, as the stats suggested, Sweden like to play on the front foot, pushing the players high. Their opponents are usually quite aware of the individual quality of Swedish attackers, and so they would happy to drop off the last line to reduce the defending space. For Sweden, they construct the attack mainly with four deep players — two centre-backs and two 6s, here would be Filippa Angeldahl, Caroline Seger, Amanda Ilestedt, and Magdalena Eriksson dictating from deep.

The full-backs usually stay high and wide to provide the width, so the wingers could sneak infield to operate in spaces, staying tighter for quick combinations. For example, here, the striker, Fridolina Rolfö positioned herself between lines. Also, when the full-backs were up, the wide spaces were vacated for the 6s to play outside of the opponent, where they found more spaces to lift a forward ball without too much engagement from the opponents.

When it comes to the direction and the passing sequences, we know that Sweden are not looking to circulate the ball much, rather, they like to go behind very quickly with intensity to push the opponents. For example, here, Angeldahl directly sends the ball forward with two runners (Hanna Glas and Johanna Rytting-Kaneryd) chasing, if they made it, Sweden would be in the last third to look for shooting opportunities.
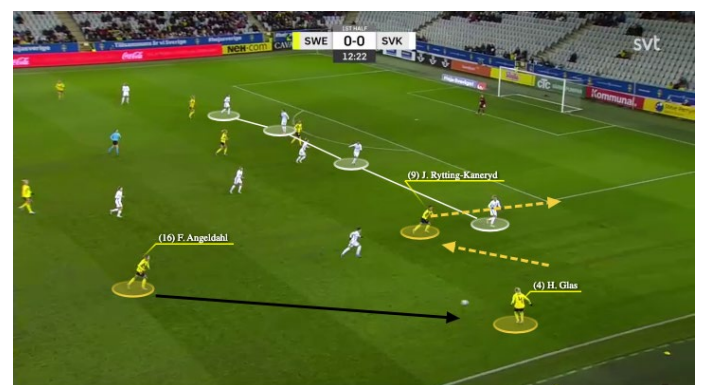
On the flank, especially the right side, Sweden have some rotations to open up spaces, mostly involving the 6, the right-back, and the winger. Here we see the same shape being used by

Sweden as Angeldahl played the ball from deep, and the right-back stayed in a high position which past the opposition winger already, resulting in a 2v1 overload on the Slovakia left-back.

As the right-winger saw Angeldahl's forward pass, she quickly snuck in and went behind to give Glas an option behind; then, Sweden could use combination plays or direct crosses to create chances in the last third.
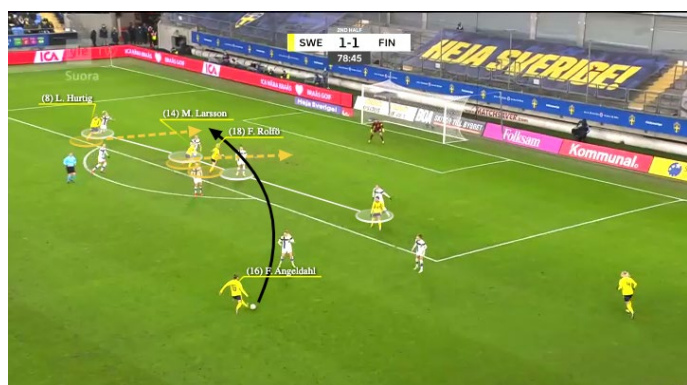

In the last third, Sweden give the opponents so much pressure because they are very committed when it comes to finishing. You can always see that many yellow shirts are rushing into the penalty box from different angles, and relatively early, at that. So, it would be a headache for the opponents when they faced the runners.

Sweden always have the front four going inside the box to knock on the doors, so they could cross and see who would be there to meet the delivery with the comfort of knowing they should have plenty of potential options on the end of the ball. This goal against Finland shows their presence in the penalty box being rewarded, as Angerdahl's delivery found Lina Hurtig, who dashed into the box with space to attack the ball given Rolfö's and Mimmi Larsson's runs brought away the defenders.

DEFENSIVE PHASE
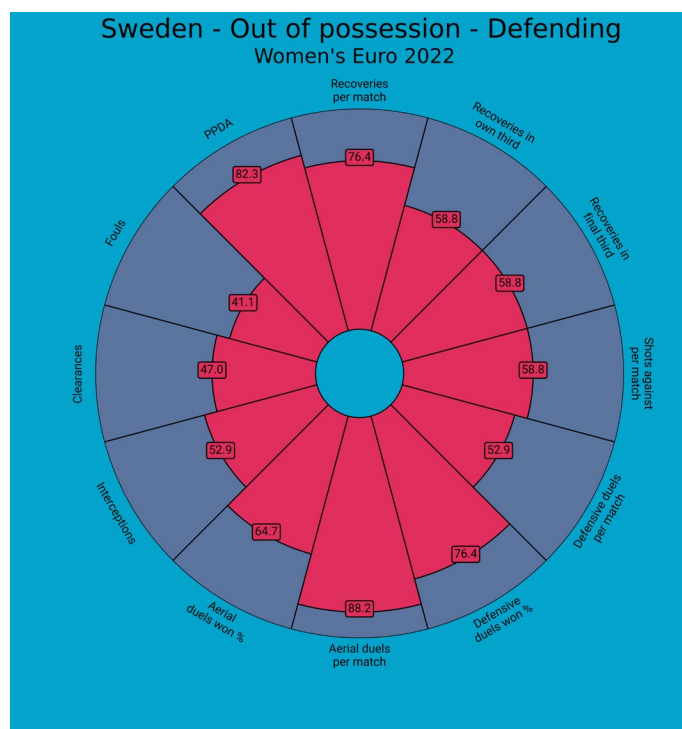
Sweden are a physical side without the ball, with promising numbers in several aspects of the game. They are a very physical side with dominance in the air as their aerial duels per match percentile sits at 88.2, and the aerial duels won % at 64.7 — also very high. They were also quite effective at stopping the ball progression of the opponent, as the defensive duels per match percentile at 52.9 is above average, while the defensive duels won% by percentile, 76.4, suggesting they perform well in this aspect. In general, Sweden have a good ability to win the ball back in both high areas and around their third, as their recoveries in the final third and recoveries in their own third percentile are at the same percentile ranking — 58.8, their capability of interception is similar as well at the percentile ranking 52.9. However, we should note that their percentile ranking in PPDA — 82.3 suggests they might not be a very aggressive side in the pressing without the ball — read more on that below.
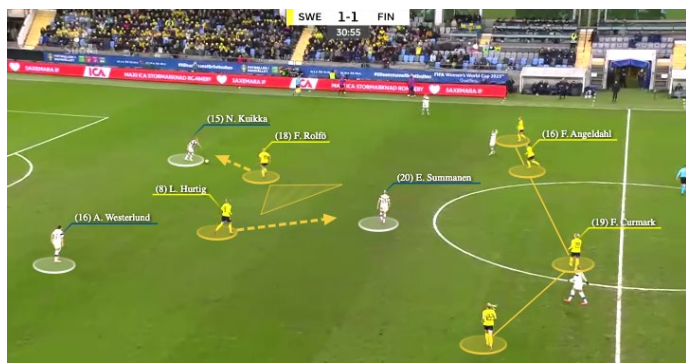
Without possession, Sweden press aggressively as opposed to waiting for the opponents to come into their half, so the ball doesn't get too close to their goal in this phase. They usually do it in a 4-4-2 formation with the "pressing & cover" work of strikers. That means the first line is responsible for controlling the centre-backs and the 6 with the body angle of their press. For example, when Fridolina Rolfö pressed the left centre-back on this occasion, her partner, Lina Hurtig was responsible to cover the 6 so the opponent could not play through the centre.

That defensive work of strikers is important as their formation only has two 6s, naturally, but when the opponents play in shapes such as 4-2-3-1, 4-1-2-3, or 3-1-3-3, Sweden would be in deficit by numbers centrally. For example, Finland had two players pinning the Sweden 6 to keep them down, so it must be Hurtig's responsibility to track back and stop the progressive plays in the centre in advance. It was okay if Finland chose a lateral pass to the free centre-backs because if the opponent had only two in the first line in this phase, the "pressing & cover" work could sustain depending on the ball movement.
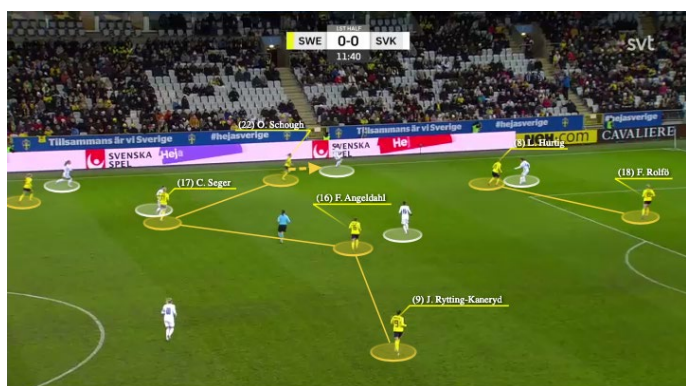

When Sweden pressed, they also emphasized the compactness of the shape because the 4-4-

2 was too symmetrical naturally, unlike the 4-2-3-1, 4-1-4-1, or 4-1-2-3, there were only three layers so sometimes they had to be clever to have more coverage between the lines.

Hence, sometimes the Sweden shape was converted to a 4-1-3-2 with a midfielder sitting deeper (Caroline Seger here) to cover the second line, and so the far side 6 and winger should come in narrowly to keep the team and the opponent on one side. Here, Johanna Rytting-Kaneryd's position allowed her to catch the player in space or press the outside defender if the pass came in this direction. Meanwhile, in the front, Hurtig and Rolfö were responsible for cutting off the circulative passing lanes of opponents. Also, the full-back would have come up to close the wide spaces, so Sweden kept the opponents in this region with even one more man (6v5) to try winning the ball back.

TRANSITIONS
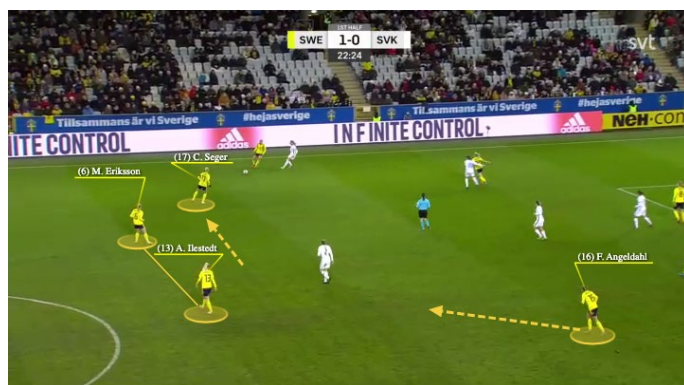
In transitions, we have to look at the rest defence of Sweden as they are expected to attack the opponents in the attacking half on most occasions. Hence, this structure matters as it should be able to kill the TAD.

Sweden's rest defence structure was derived from the construction phase — where four deep players were present. It was usually a 2-2, but the 6 on the ball side was given more freedom to push higher, or drift wider to maintain closer support with the full-back and winger on her side.

For example, Caroline Seger, in this example, could help the outside players and leave her position. However, when that happens, the other 6 must be able to shift over, and position herself centrally, in front of the centre-backs, so the group stayed together for counter-pressing as Filippa Angeldahl was moving inside in this image.
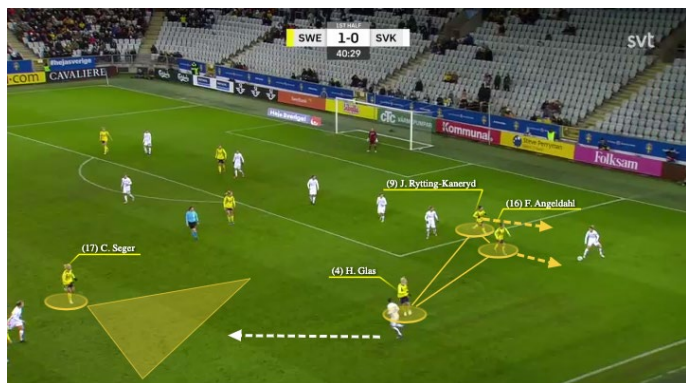
The next image in this section is more about how Sweden executed the counter-pressing in higher areas. Recalling the rotations and attacking group on the flank, with this attacking scheme, Sweden players were close to each other and they could try to win the ball back together when there were turnovers. Here, we see Johanna Rytting-Kaneryd and Angeldahl were attacking the ball together, while they had Hanna Glas covering.

Another part of the 2-2 rest defence structure was that the ball-side 6 (Angeldahl) would often come out to counter-press, while the other 6 (Seger) must position herself in the centre so she could cover the counter-press as we suggested in this image. If Sweden won the ball back, it would be another chance for them to push in the last third.
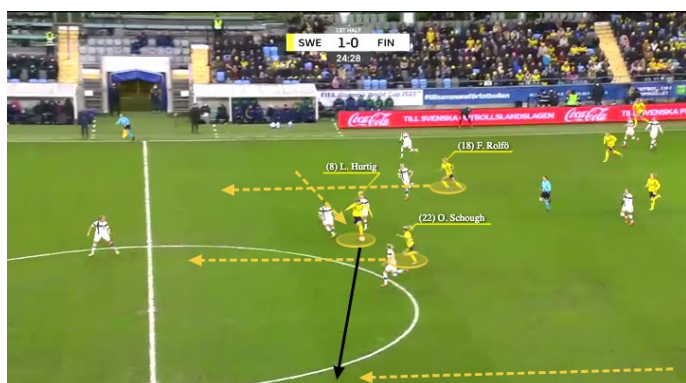

Sweden are also quite good in TDA because they possess strong individual quality to take the opposition on in 1v1 situations. Tactically, the front players share a great mindset and pace to run forward relentlessly, as we catch a glimpse of in this image.

As Lina Hurtig came to take the ball, the other attackers — Fridolina Rolfö and Olivia Schough were all running into space, so they pushed the defenders away to open spaces for Hurtig to connect the wide players from deep. You could imagine that when the ball reached the player on the left side, Sweden could generate an immediate threat given there were three players — Hurtig, Rolfö, and Schough — in front of the ball to support.

FORWARDS

Fridolina Rolfö is a very versatile player but we would expect her to start as a 9 under Gerhardsson's Sweden. Despite being deployed as a left-back in some games, she still recorded 0.5 xG/90 and 3.19 shots/90 this season at the club level. She was also a player with good individual quality as her dribbling was strong, 4.71 dribbles/90 with a success rate of 73.5%. Sweden would rely on her 1v1 qualities.

MIDFIELDERS

The midfield duo partnership between Filippa Angeldahl and Caroline Seger should be solid enough for the team. At the club level, Angeldahl has good threats to goal with 0.27 xG/90 from 2.21 shots/90, in addition to 2.75 touches in the penalty box/90. She could also create for the team as her xA/90 at 0.12 is quite impressive too, with an average of 12.79 forward passes/90. However, aerially she is not too strong given she only manages 0.4 aerial duels/90, with a 16.7% win rate.

Therefore, her partner, Seger from Rosengård should be able to compensate. She had fewer shots/90 (0.55) but averaged 3.62 aerial duels/90 and a win rate of 56.5%, which is a great help to Angeldahl. Seger is good and so aggressive in defending, and she also has other promising stats, including 12.6 recoveries/90, 6.06 interceptions/90, and 5.35 defensive duels/90 with a win rate at 73.5% in Damallsvenskan this season.

DEFENDERS

As we have suggested, Magdalena Eriksson and Amanda Ilestedt would form a rock-solid base in the defence. In terms of defending, Eriksson is very good with 10.61 recoveries/90. She's also active and effective in the air with 5.66 aerial duels/90 and a win rate of 63.4%. In addition, she could effectively deny the ball progression of opponents as her defensive duels/90, 4.82 might not be high, but the success rate at 64.5% is quite good. Eriksson would also be very important in the attack, as she has a strong mindset of moving the ball forward. She had 58.5 passes/90 but 41.2% of these passes were forward passes.

BEST PERFORMER
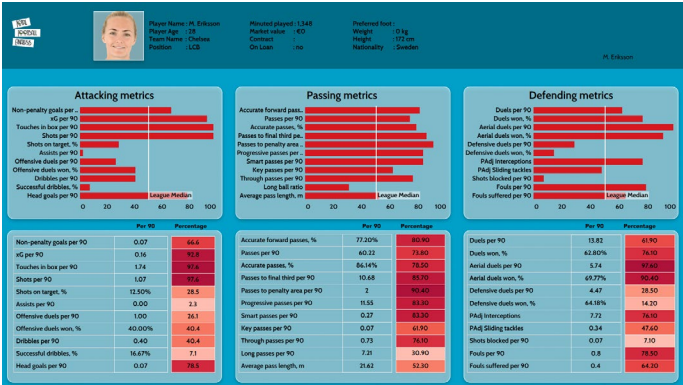
There are many quality players in the Sweden squad, and most of them are playing in big clubs across Europe. However, we chose Magdalena Eriksson as the one to watch because she is so important to the team. With the ball, she is the starter of the attacks who could send the ball forward to teammates, while without the ball, she has to be very solid to help the team achieve stability, so Sweden could take better control of the game. For example, in transitions, sometimes Eriksson might be exposed to 1v1 situations but she must be very calm to handle them, given that Sweden push the line quite high. In addition to the tactical elements, Eriksson, at 28, is also a player entering her peak in her career. With good experiences at Chelsea and continental competitions, she is the vice-captain of the team and her leadership should be able to bond the group together to achieve memorable results in the competition.

TOURNAMENT PREDICTION

At the moment, the Swedish women's national football team is the second in the world according to the FIFA Ranking system, but they sit at the top of Europe as only the USWNT rank higher than them. With a good squad, individual quality and plenty of experience, we should expect them to be the favourites for the competition and may even lift the title for the first time since the very first UEFA Women's Championship back in 1984.

SWITZERLAND:

GROUP C

BRANDON LISS // @brandthebeast

The Switzerland women's national team's first major tournament came in 2015 at the Women's World Cup in Canada, before two years later qualifying for the 2017 European Championships. Those European Championships did not ultimately end as many Swiss players and fans would have hoped, with the side getting knocked out in the group stage. This time around, however, this Swiss represent a more experienced outfit and getting out of their group should be the goal.

However, this will be no easy task for Nils Nielsen's squad, with Switzerland facing the likes of Portugal, Sweden and the Netherlands. Battling the group stage out against the #2 and #5 ranked sides in the world according to FIFA will be no easy task, but it will surely be one that Nielsen's side relishes once their tournament gets started on 9th July. The Swiss could pose a threat to anyone in this tournament, with them possibly being a dark horse in this tournament.

PREDICTED STARTING XI

Nils Nielsen regularly switches tactics and formations from match to match, with the side capable of lining up in either a 4-3-3, 4-4-2, or 4-2-3-1. Nielsen is also a manager that likes to listen to input from his players before a match, seeing if they have any ideas in regards to a tactical setup against that particular opponent. However, for this tournament, the Swiss are expected to line up in a 4-2-3-1 formation, with each player capable of alternating positions throughout the match. It would not be surprising to see the formation switch during their matches as the game progresses.

Gaëlle Thalmann will most likely be continuing as the first-choice goalkeeper, with the veteran shot-stopper looking to add to her 84 caps for the national team. The centre-back partnership will most likely be Hoffenheim's Luana Bühler and Levante's Viola Calligaris, who have become Nielsen's preferred pairing in recent international matches. It would not be a big surprise, though, to see the more experienced Rachel Rinast replace one of those two in the backline. The two fullback positions are pretty set in stone for Nielsen, with Paris FC's Eseosa Aigbogun the nailed-down starter at left-back. Meanwhile, on the right side, Noelle Maritz will be the likely starter, with the United States-born Swiss international a key player in the backline.

Moving forward into defensive midfield, those two places will be occupied by Arsenal midfielder and national team captain Lia Wälti, and young up-and-coming star of the Swiss side, 19-year-old Riola Xhemaili. These two midfielders complement each other well and will need to have a good tournament if the Swiss are to make it far, with them acting as the engine room of the midfield.

One of Switzerland's best attackers, Alisha Lehmann, made the personal decision to withdraw herself from selection for the final squad before the tournament to prioritise her mental health. In her absence, we believe Coumba Sow and Géraldine Reuteler will be the likely starters in the two wide attacking midfield positions. They will be tasked to create chances from the wide areas for the two star attackers of this Swiss side. Playing centrally will be Paris Saint-Germain's Ramona Bachmann, with key player Ana-Maria Crnogorčević most likely being deployed as the central striker. Though Crnogorčević is normally a defensive player, she plays a more attacking role for the national team, and that will probably be the case in this tournament.
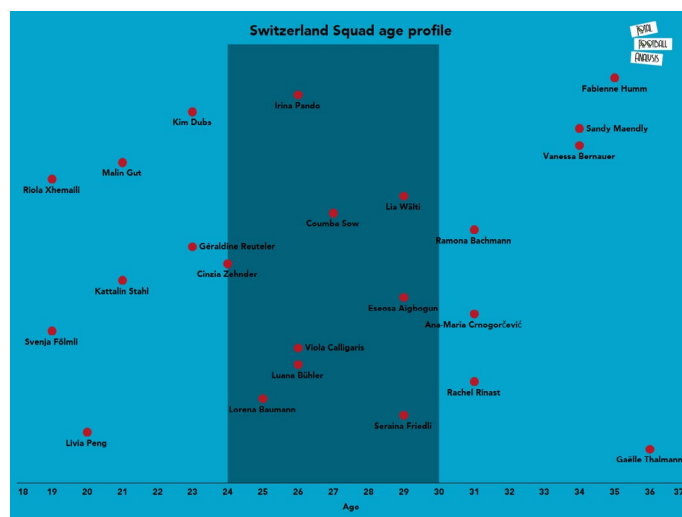
The final Switzerland squad has not yet been named for Euro 2022 at the time of writing, with that not expected until mid-June, but the age scatter plot above displays what the likely final squad will be. The Swiss favour a rather mixed squad in terms of age distribution, with a healthy dose of young players, a majority of players at the peaks of their respective careers and a selection of experienced players as well.

The majority of the likely starting XI for this tournament will be made up of players at the peaks of their careers, but Riola Xhemaili, the youngest player on this scatter plot, will be a key starter as well. Some experienced players will also be key starters, with Gäelle Thalmann, Ramona Bachmann, and Ana-Maria Crnogorčević being the first three names on the team sheet for Nils Nielsen.

ATTACKING PHASE

The attacking graphic above shows Switzerland's ranks in certain attacking metrics, with the Swiss opting for a more possession-based system. They also make a high number of forward passes and are clinical in front of goal. Their high percentile ranking of shots on target as well as xG make them a team that is always looking for an opportunity to take a shot on goal. The Swiss look to be the side that dominates most of their matches, so it will be interesting to see how this style of play translates to the tournament when they are matched up against both Sweden and the Netherlands. Following are a couple of examples of Switzerland in the attacking phase.

Our first glimpse of the Swiss attacking phase shows what they look to do when it comes to breaking into the final third. Crnogorčević received the ball with her back to goal in the opponent's attacking third before turning and driving into the space. The intelligent movements of the other forward players allowed her space and gave her passing options. Bachmann cuts inside into a central position, dragging the Italian fullback narrow. With Aigbogun making an overlapping run down the flank, this allows Sow to make a run into the penalty box. Crnogorčević attempts to find Sow, but her pass is underhit.

The graphic earlier showed that the final third passes that Switzerland plays are not in the highest percentile. This is because the attackers prefer to receive with their backs to goal before driving into the final third. This means fewer passes are played in the final third, but the clinical ability is still there.

The graphic earlier in the section also showed how the Swiss rank in a high percentile for shots on target % as well. This does not just mean shots from inside the penalty box, this Swiss side likes to attempt shots from distance as well. In the attacking phase above, the decoy runs of both Fölmli and Aigbogun can allow Bachmann the space to attempt a shot from distance. Though she did not score with her attempt, it forced the Italy goalkeeper into a save.

Though Switzerland will not be the best attacking side on display at this competition, their ability in possession, as well as the number of shots that they attempt that are on target, will make

them a tough side to defend against during the tournament.

DEFENSIVE PHASE
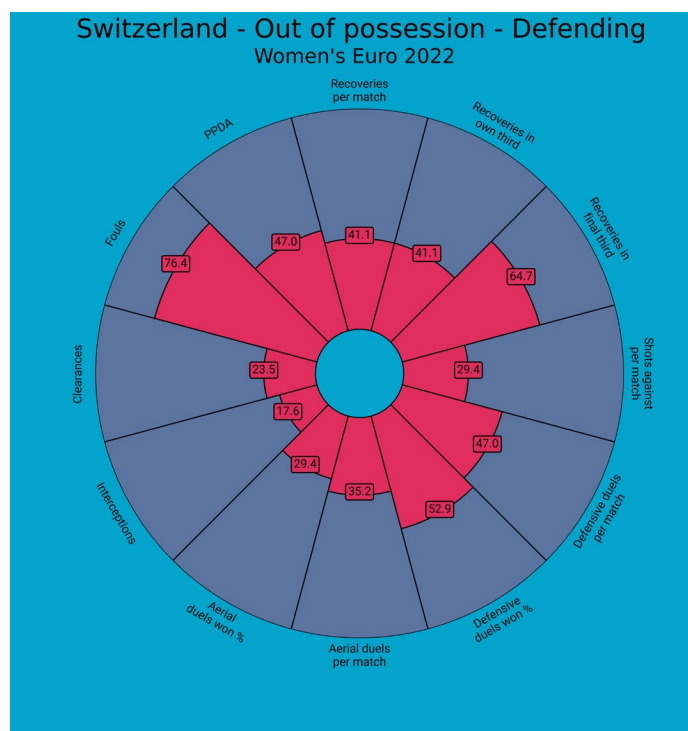
When it comes to how this Switzerland side plays while out of possession, their fairly high number of recoveries in the final third are indicative of their tendency to quickly put the opposition under pressure when they lose possession, looking to gain it back as quickly as possible. This high number of fouls also comes partially as a result of their aggressiveness when it comes to committing to challenges, with the Swiss players not afraid to commit to a challenge even if it results in a foul. They are not the strongest when it comes to aerial challenges, with them ranking in the low percentiles in those categories.

As the graphic earlier showed, Switzerland look to often make recoveries in the final third, and from our video analysis, this is another factor that leads to more fouls being committed as a result. This aggressive tendency while defending is shown above. As Croatia look to play a pass out from the back, Lia Wälti quickly engages the player receiving the pass and subsequently fouls her. This quick closing down of the opposition allows fewer quick passing sequences for the opposition but may leave the Swiss defensive line exposed if the ball can be played through.

When it comes to a defensive shape, Nielsen is known to alternate formations throughout a match, but the back four is normally a set theme. It is further ahead in midfield where this shape can sometimes differ. The image above shows a 4-2-3-1 while defending, but this can also become a 4-1-4-1. Switzerland looks to crowd out the central areas while defending, which forces the opposition into the wide areas. The opposition are naturally less dangerous when they have the ball on the flanks, so this crowding out of the midfield makes the Swiss a sturdier defensive unit.

TRANSITIONS

When it comes to attacking transitional moments, a lot of Switzerland's ability on the counter comes from their high defensive positions when they turn over possession. As a result of Romania being dispossessed high up the pitch, the Swiss can quickly break and have attacking options in transition. This is because the Swiss attackers don't quickly drop back into a defensive shape when they turn over possession, rather they try to quickly win the ball back — a high-risk, high-reward strategy. Lia Wälti can win possession back in an advanced midfield position, and this allows Alisha Lehmann to make an unmarked run behind the Romania defence. These quick break moments in transition make the Swiss a dangerous side when it comes to attacking transition moments.

When it comes to defending in transition, Switzerland look to keep a compact central defensive block which, as a result, forces the opposition to move the ball out wide. The two defensive midfielders also look to keep tight centrally, eliminating any space for the opposition to move into in the central areas. The play being forced into wide areas gives the Swiss a numerical advantage inside the penalty box, which makes it easier to defend against incoming crosses from the opposition.

Though Switzerland are set up to be a more possession-based side in possession and an aggressive side out of possession, transitional moments may be key for them in this tournament. Being in a group with Sweden and the Netherlands means they may not be able to hold as much possession, which means transitional moments may be critical.

FORWARDS

When looking at the forward players for Switzerland, it is not only goals they will contribute to their side's run in the European Championships this summer — they will also contribute with their dribbling and passing ability. When looking at the likely starters in the attacking roles for the Swiss, Ana-Maria Crnogorčević is averaging 3.17 dribbles per 90 with the national team, with a success rate of 58.1%, Géraldine Reuteler averages 3.66 dribbles per 90 with a 57.1% success rate, Ramona Bachmann is averaging 9.73 dribbles per 90 with a 60.2% success rate, and Svenja Fölmli with 4.26 dribbles per 90 with a 64.9% success rate.

Passing is another area where the Swiss forwards excel. When looking at the pass accuracies for the likely starters, you have: Svenja Fölmli at 78.3%, Ramona Bachmann at 75.9%, Géraldine Reuteler at 84.2%, and Ana-Maria Crnogorčević at 73.5%.

MIDFIELDERS

When it comes to how the Switzerland women's national team likes to play, with their possession-oriented style, the passing of the midfielders has to be good to facilitate this tactic. Well, when looking at the likely midfielders that will see the field during the European Championships, this is the case. Lia Wälti has a pass accuracy of 84.8% with the national team, Riola Xhemaili 77.5%, Coumba Sow 80.3%, Vanessa Bernauer 74.5%, and Sandy Maendly 77.9%. While Wälti and Xhemaili are the likely starters in defensive midfield, with Sow as a possible starter as well, the passing quality of all the midfielders for Nils Nielsen will be a valuable asset throughout the tournament.

When it comes to the possession oriented system that Nils Nielsen uses with the Swiss national team, the need for the deeper lying midfielders to be able to progress the ball forward is key to chance creation. National team captain Lia Wälti is a prime example of one of the Swiss's best ball progressers in midfield, with her attempting 13.72 passes to the final third per 90 minutes. Wälti is not the only deep lying ball progresser however for the Swiss. Riola Xhemaili attempts 4.29 passes to the final third per 90, while Coumba Sow attempts 4.16. These are a couple of reasons why the Swiss midfielders will play a critical part in their chances throughout the tournament.

DEFENDERS

When it comes to defenders, being able to excel and win duels is key to winning back possession for your side and preventing the opposition from scoring chances. The Swiss defenders look to engage in challenges often, and while they are a side that commits a lot of fouls, they also win a majority of the duels in which they engage. Eseosa Aigbogun has won 50.4% of her duels when playing for the national team, Viola Calligaris 60.8%, Rachel Rinast 45.7%, Julia Stierli 63.6%, Luana Bühler 63.4%, and Noelle Maritz 56%. The Swiss defensive unit is a relatively strong one, and their success in duels will be critical to tournament success.

BEST PLAYER

When looking for a key player in this Switzerland team, it is hard to look past the Swiss army knife that is Ana-Maria Crnogorčević. The 31-year-old Barcelona defender is an impact player for her national team, and it is in attack instead of defence. While she may play mostly as a defender at club level, she plays as the central striker with Switzerland. In 125 caps for the national team, Crongorčević has 61 goals, which shows her goal-scoring prowess.

Looking at the visual which looks at her domestic performances for the last calendar year and compares her statistics in each noted area with the league median, we can see that she excels in almost all the attacking metrics, except for her percentage of offensive duels won, with her touches in the box per 90 being a key metric to look at. While her goal-scoring ability is the main attribute that the Swiss will rely on her for, Crnogorčević's link play will also be key. While Crnogorčević will get into the box and shoot herself, she will also drop into the pockets of space and let the attacking midfield players run

beyond her. Her pass accuracy of 81.6%, along with her 3.22 passes to the final third per 90 and 4.11 passes to the penalty area per 90 illustrate the capabilities of Crnogorčević when it comes to linking play together as well.

Though Crnogorčević really does not have many weaknesses, ironically at national team level, the weaknesses she does have are defensive. This is mostly due in part to her more advanced starting position when playing for Switzerland, with her ranking low in the metrics on duels per 90 as well as defensive duels per 90. All in all, however, Ana-Maria Crnogorčević will play a large part in whether the Swiss will progress far in the tournament or once again be knocked out in the group stages.

TOURNAMENT PREDICTION

The 2017 European Championships were the first Euros that the Switzerland women's national team qualified for, and they ended up getting knocked out in the group stages. This time around, with the experience they have gathered, as well as the introduction of some young star players (Ex. Riola Xhemaili), Nils Nielsen will hope his side at least goes one better.

Getting out of the group stages and into the last eight of the competition should be the goal for the Swiss, with anything further than that a pleasant surprise. Swiss fans will hope that their side can be a Cinderella story and progress far in the tournament, and with the talent that they possess, it is possible.

TOTAL FOOTBALL ANALYSIS

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OUR CLIENTS COMPETE IN

BARBARA BONANSEA:

ITALY

LUIS KIRCHER // @luiskircher

On the up under Milena Bertolini, Le Azzurre are eyeing a place in the last four for the first time in 25 years. Experienced players will be key for the Italian Women's national team during the European Championship 2022. While playing against France, Iceland and Belgium in the group stage, Barbara Bonansea could become the star of Bertolini's team.

BACKGROUND

The Italian winger is the team's talismanic figure and best offensive player. At 30 years of age, she's in the prime of her career and will be extremely important in this tournament. She already played 69 times for the Italian Women's National Team.

Bonansea ranks third in all-time appearances for Juventus Women — which is pretty impressive considering she's had a couple of lengthy injury spells that have kept her on the sidelines for extended periods of time. When healthy, though, Bonansea has proven to be arguably Juve's and Italy's best attacking threat, with the capability to set up one of her teammates just as much as she's capable of scoring on her own.

In this tactical analysis, we look at the player in closer detail to explain her importance to the Italian National team and what makes her a top-class forward.

DATA ANALYSIS

To start, we'll look at Bonansea's data profile for the 2021/22 campaign for Juventus. Here, we'll discuss her main attacking, defending and passing characteristics and see how she's performed. Let's see what she excels at in the following graph.
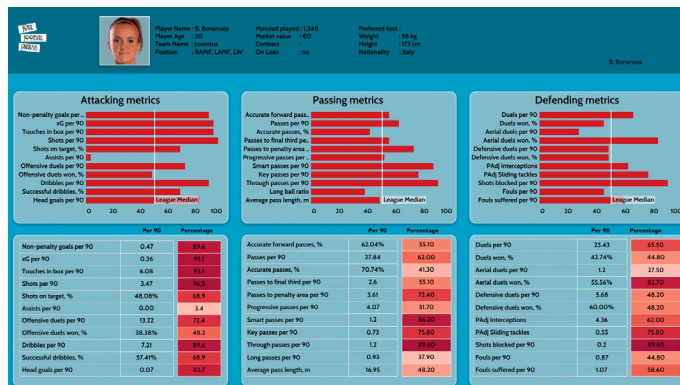
It is no surprise that her biggest strengths are in attack. With 3.47 shots per 90, Bonansea ranks in the 96th percentile for this particular metric. She provides lots of touches in the opposition's box (6.08 per 90) and dribbles (7.21 per 90). The quality of her chances is generally good as well since her xG per 90 (0.36) ranks her in the 93rd percentile. With only 38.38% of her offensive duels being successful and by providing 0 assists, she has two weaknesses to work on.

By taking a look at her passing metrics, we can assume that her creativity is a big strength that the Italian national team will benefit from. Even if she can work on the accuracy of her passes (70.74%), she creates lots of chances by playing passes into dangerous areas. She is one of the best players in terms of passes to the penalty area (3.61 per 90), key passes (0.73 per 90), smart passes (1.2 per 90) and especially through passes (1.2 per 90).

Since Bonansea is an attacking mind responsible for creating chances, her defensive statistics are rather average compared to other players in her domestic league. Playing for one of the best clubs in Italy, it is no surprise that she engages in few defensive duels (5.68 per 90). Due to their technically gifted players, Juventus do not operate with lots of long balls. So, she does not provide lots of aerial duels (1.2 per 90) either. However, her interceptions and sliding tackles in defensive transition are quite good.

ATTACKING PHASE

Bonansea's key strength is her ability to identify space combined with her positioning between the lines. This enables her to force teams to be proactive in the way they mark the midfielder. Her movement with the ball is very direct which causes multiple defenders to suffocate the space she moves into. Combined with her creative passing, this makes her a dangerous proposition.

Bonansea's movement and positioning are the foundation of her ability to score goals or pick up assists. It's even more effective on the ball where she's able to capitalise and control the next move. Being able to carry the ball means she can progress the ball forward, dragging opponents out of position and giving her teammates space to move into.

The following situation of play sees the winger pick up a wayward pass with her back to goal. However, she manages to turn and carry the ball past a couple of Milan defenders. The progressive carry pulls in several players but her quick decision-making means she's able to spot the vacant space in behind the defence with a penetrative pass for the striker to latch onto.

A large portion of Bonansea's game revolves around her creativity and vision. The end product is a result of her wide range of passing that is borne from her creativity. Being able to choose from an array of passes, Bonansea is capable of

unlocking defences with pinpoint line-breaking balls along with quick interchangeable link-up play between midfielders and forwards.

— Progressive pass   — Progressive run
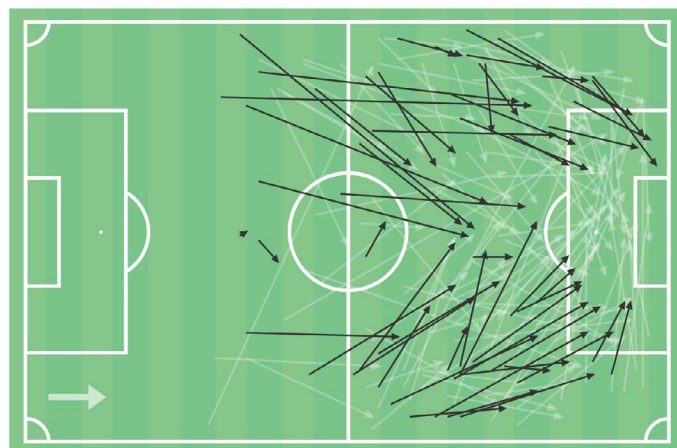
Given Juventus come up against teams that will look to defend deep against them, Bonansea's passing becomes far more important.

Bonansea's close control and timing are key features of her creative passing. However, what's most impressive is the by-product of her ability to create space by attracting players to her before passing through a team's defence.

As you can see in the following sequence, Bonansea receives a pass in space between multiple Fiorentina defenders. To stop her advance, three players around step up to press her.

This shifts the entire focus onto her, which has created space for Lina Mona Andrea Hurtig to receive a free pass.

Even under pressure against teams that are more possession-hungry, Bonansea has an influence on the ball. These possession-dominant sides will want to dispossess teams quickly and often will be with a slightly higher defensive line and a good pressing strategy. She's heavily involved in Juventus' playmaking and Italy will also be relying on her as their primary playmaker.

Taking the next example from Juventus' game against Olympique Lyon last season, Bonansea receives the ball in space but turns into Wendie Renard. The Italian expertly holds the ball and waits patiently for Hurtig.

Then, she plays the ball in behind the Lyon defence with a perfect-timed through pass.

Moreover, at Italy's national team, Girelli, Bonansea and Cernoia's constant movements and exchange of positions inside the final third confuse their opponents and prevent them from having clear reference points when defending.

TRANSITION

As noted before in this tactical analysis, Bonansea is generally positioned high and wide in the attacking phase and the same can be said when the squad is trying to transition from deep. Her smart movements and positioning allow her to be an outlet down the flanks, but especially in the centre.

Anyone who has watched Bonansea will tell you that much of her upside comes from smart movement and the ability to exploit space. The Italian is very good at finding areas in and around the box to put herself in excellent positions to create or score goals.

A lot of players in her position prefer to play between the lines and place themselves in the half-spaces but Bonansea is comfortable in taking up wider spaces and making decisions from there; this affords her more time to decide her next move.

Take this goal she scored against AC Milan, for example. In the clip, Juventus manage to intercept Milan's build-up and a pass from their forward. Martina Rosucci picks up possession in the half-space and looks for forward options. At this point, the Juventus forwards are fluid to try and give Rosucci a passing option.


Bonansea's starting position was wide on the right, but when she saw Tuija Annika Hyyrynen coming in on the overlap, she drifted inside and found space more centrally.

DEFENSIVE PHASE

Juventus utilized a 4-2-3-1 and a 4-3-3 for the majority of their last campaign. Bonansea operated mainly at right-wing but she did get used on the left on occasion. In each of these systems, she has operated in a wider role with the freedom to stay wide or come inside.
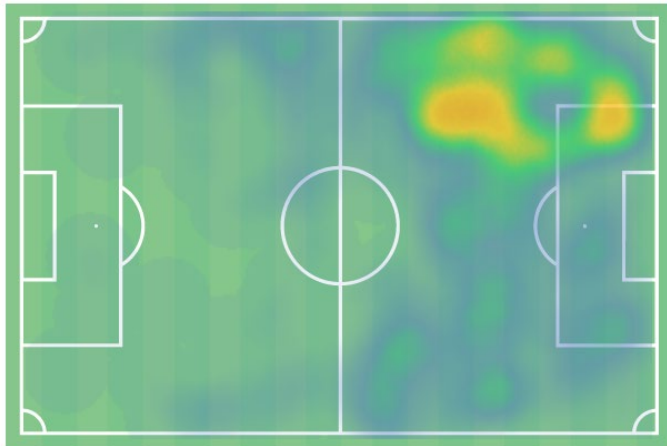
However, as you can see, her heat map shows how much she influenced play on the left in the national team. Italy play in a 4-3-3 formation most of the time. There's significant movement between those areas indicating that she tends to want to come inside to cross or pass but will stay wide when needed.

Bonansea has her biggest strengths in the attacking phase of the game but that doesn't mean she's not effective off the ball as well. To fully understand how she defends, we have to understand how Juventus defend as a team in Serie A. In the 2021/22 campaign, the Bianchoneri had the fifth-lowest PPDA (passes allowed per defensive action) value: 8.57. The lower the PPDA number, the more aggressive the team presses in general. The league average was 9.84, indicating that Juve were more aggressive than average.

However, Juventus' challenge intensity for the same season stands at 6.2 — below league average (6.43). Therefore, Juventus presses high but not at the highest intensity. If they do not win the ball back immediately, they fall back. Here, Bonansea's positioning plays a major role again. As with the attacking phase, Bonansea provides smart movements in defence too and recovers lots of balls due to positioning.
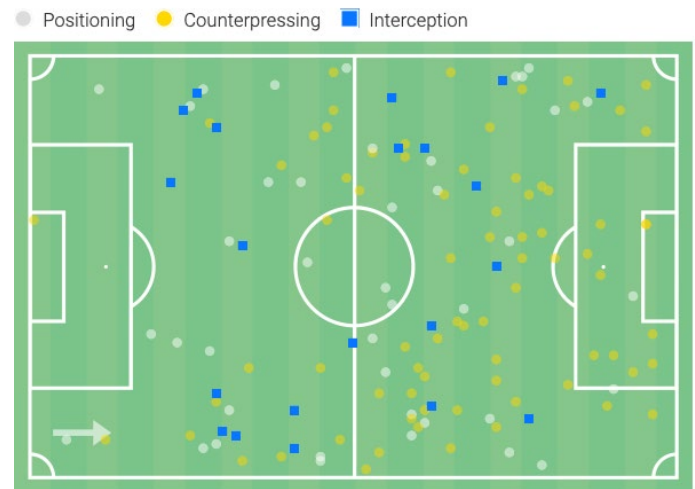
By looking at the map, we can note that most of Bonansea's defensive duels come very high up the pitch, even stretching to the opposition's penalty area. Of course, this is all connected to how Juventus set up their defensive block.

PHYSICAL PROFILE

In this part of our tactical analysis of Barbara Bonansea, we'll analyse her physical profile. This includes her height, build, mobility, power, stamina, acceleration and pace in different scenarios and phases of play.

Bonansea is 173 cm tall and weighs around 57 kg, which makes for almost an ideal frame for holding the ball. Being quite tall, Bonansea can use her frame well to shield and control the ball and even brush off defenders. One of the big aspects of a good forward is how resistant they are to being dominated by their markers. The winger is quite good in duels and holding onto the ball.

Because she doesn't exactly have a deep centre of gravity, she's not known for world-class dribbling. Furthermore, she is not exactly the

fastest player in the world. That is one reason why she also cuts inside often instead of going into a 1-vs-1-situation on the wing. Therefore, she prefers to use her body to defeat her opponent. Another possibility in this regard is her game intelligence; as already mentioned, Bonansea excels in smart movements and good positioning.

CONCLUSION

Barbara Bonansea is a versatile winger who can play across the front line but is more naturally a winger. Her playstyle is very much predicated around being a more creative and penetrative presence than a traditional run-and-cross type winger. As a result, she is a goal threat with an excellent first touch and an intelligent sense of positioning. This combination makes for a lethal player coming in off the right to either find a passing solution or a shot-creating action. Therefore, she will probably be Italy's key player in the tournament.

BELGIUM:

GROUP D

ALFIE PEARSON // @alfiepear

Finishing top of their qualifying group with just one loss, Belgium have reached the UEFA Women's European Championship for just the second time ever. After first qualifying for the tournament in 2017 and failing to reach the knockout stage, Belgium are set to encounter another challenging group in 2022. Currently 20th in the world rankings, the Red Flames are ranked behind group stage opponents France (3rd), Italy (14th), and Iceland (18th). With limited tournament experience alongside a difficult group, many will be expecting little from Belgium.

However, Ives Serneels' team are entering the tournament with great confidence. Coming off the back of success in the 2022 Pinatar Cup, in which they were victorious in two penalty shootouts, they showed elements of what is required to win in knockout competition. Also chasing World Cup qualification for the first time ever, Belgium have scored 49 goals as they relentlessly pursue group-leaders Norway with two games remaining. This frightening goal-scoring ability will undeniably intimidate their group-stage opponents, so maybe the Belgian Red Flames could progress into the knockouts.

PREDICTED STARTING XI

Under Ives Serneels, Belgium have commonly deployed a 4-1-2-1-2 — although, sometimes, they may set up in a 4-3-3. Gent's Nicky Evrard will start between the sticks for the Red Flames with a centre-back pairing of Laura De Neve and Amber Tysiak in front of her. After missing the last international break, Tysiak will partner De Neve to form a balanced, defensively strong yet positive in-possession pairing. It's expected that the back four will be completed with the experience of right-back Laura Deloose and left-back Davina Philtjens, who has over 100 caps for Belgium.

The Belgian midfield and forward selections are stacked with versatility; some holding midfielders have covered at centre-back, while some forwards have dropped back to play a midfield role, for example. Janice Cayman, the nation's most capped player ever, epitomises their versatility. Expected to play on the right of their midfield diamond, Lyon's Cayman has also appeared at right-back and in the forward line. One of Belgium's top assisters in Sarah Wijnants is expected to play on the opposite flank, with her tidy footwork and movement from the wing always a threat to opponents.

Behind all their attacking talent, Belgium need a holding midfielder capable of regaining and recycling possession. Despite Reading's Justine Vanhaevermaet's impressive performances and superior ball-winning ability, we have selected PSV's Julie Biesmans. However, both players are capable starters to fulfil the role, with OH Leuven's Lenie Onzia always an option off the bench. All these players have been deployed at centre-back too, with Biesmans also recently playing as a left midfielder.

Tine De Caigny of Hoffenheim regularly supports the striker pairing from attacking midfield, looking to break into the box and overload centre-backs. Not always offering defensive influence, her attacking output definitely justifies her inclusion in the starting XI. Ahead of De Caigny will likely be Hannah Eurlings and key player Tessa Wullaert. Wullaert is Belgium's record goalscorer, and for her country this season is averaging a goal involvement every 30 minutes! Despite being without Wullaert's goal-scoring record, Eurlings is crucial to Belgium due to her movement in behind constantly testing opposition defences.

Belgium Squad age profile

ATTACKING PHASE

Belgium - In possession - Attacking
Women's Euro 2022

Serneels is capable of employing a bold, attacking-heavy approach to overload opposition defences. Usually set up in a 2-3-5 in possession, the five players positioned in the front line can cause havoc to opposition defences, leading to Belgium's stellar goal-scoring numbers. Recently, Belgium's 4-1-2-1-2 on paper transitions into the front five with the attacking midfielder and two wide players joining the striker partnership.

Here is an example of Belgium operating with a front five to successfully overload Kosovo. Despite having every player behind the ball, the overload has perturbed the Kosovan defensive structure and allowed Belgium to penetrate in behind on the right-wing via a centre-back's through ball. It is common for Belgium to attempt through balls due to their forward's tendencies to sit on the shoulder of the defender to run in behind. Often, the strikers will start in an offside position before dropping back onside to perfectly time their run in behind. This strategy can lead to lots of offsides, but correct timing of runs from Eurlings and Wullaert particularly creates clear-cut chances.

Belgium's front five also allows them to commit numbers into the box with possession in the final third. Generally attacking the box from wide areas, Belgium can bring their strike partnership, attacking midfielder, and far-side winger into the box to attack crosses. With full-backs permitted to advance in some games, the number can rise to five players inside the box to trouble opposition defences. This occurs more frequently on the left-wing, with the left-winger inverting so left-back Philtjens can overlap or be the width provider.

Although the front five can cause issues for opposition defences, their lack of help in build-up and ball progression can hinder Belgium. This relies on the holding midfielder, centre-backs and full-backs to access the forward line. Typically, the full-backs will be used to find the wingers from deeper areas but overall, it's the centre-backs that have the greatest influence. The holding midfielder is mainly an option for recycling possession and changing the point of attack from one wing to the other but rarely attempts probing passes. Their movement is often away from the centre-back in possession to create space for them.

The centre-backs are assertive with their first touch, looking to carry the ball forwards into the final third when given space. They rarely attempt cross-field diagonals but the centre-backs are accurate and dangerous with their passes into the half-space and behind defences, a bonus to positioning centre-backs on the side of their strongest foot.
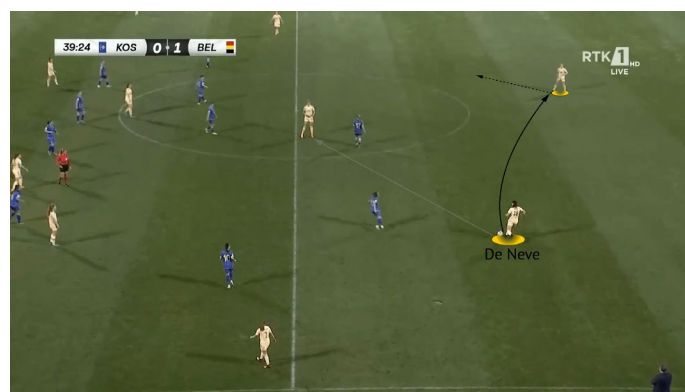
The attacking midfielder, usually Tine De Caigny, is positioned in the front five and tends to stay there, floating between the lines, not dropping back to receive in build-up. When Belgium deploy a 4-3-3 formation, they continue to adopt the 2-3-5 in possession by pushing the two central midfielders into the half-spaces of the front five. However, whilst the central midfielders are initially occupying spaces in the front five, they drop off to become passing options to receive off the centre-backs significantly more than De Caigny as an attacking midfielder. The 4-3-3, Serneels' alternative formation, has been

used against stronger opposition and in tighter games to provide more defensive solidity with an adjustment of the central midfielders' positioning into deeper areas rather than in the front five.

DEFENSIVE PHASE

Belgium - Out of possession - Defending
Women's Euro 2022
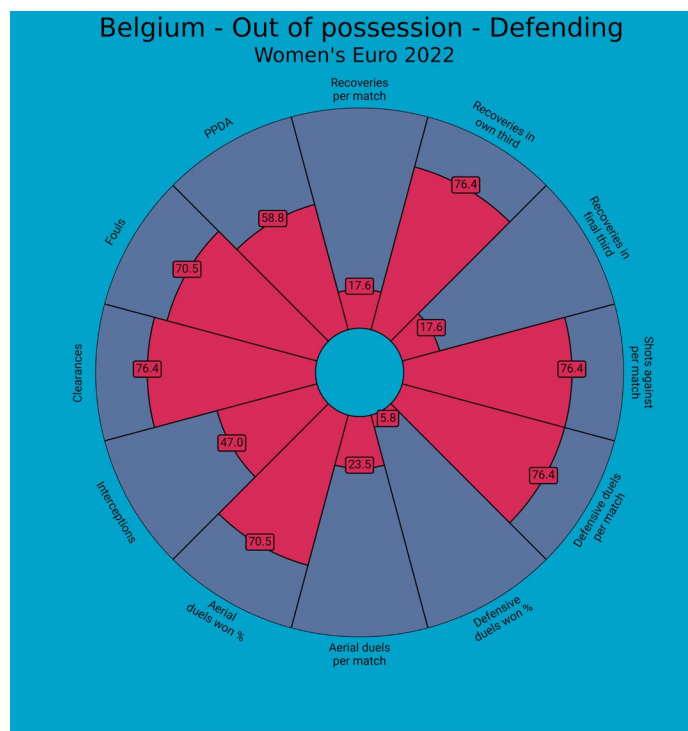
Ordinarily, Belgium's out-of-possession shape is a 4-1-3-2. This has similarities to their in-possession shape, with the holding midfielder essentially detached from the midfield unit. The shape also allows Serneels' team to easily transition from in possession to out of possession, as the attacking and wide midfielders simply drop back.

From opposition goal kicks, Belgium set up in the 4-1-3-2, as shown below in the example against Albania. The strikers are responsible for pressing the opposition centre-backs, angling their press to force the ball wide to the full-back. The angle of the striker's press must also keep the opposition pivot player in their cover shadow, positioned to easily intercept an attempted pass to them. Belgium's wingers start fairly narrow, preventing central progression, with the centre-

back's pass into the full-back their trigger to press in-to-out. When the opposition deploy a single pivot, Belgium's attacking midfielder tends to man-mark them. Whereas in the example below, the attacking midfielder is positioned between Albania's double pivot.
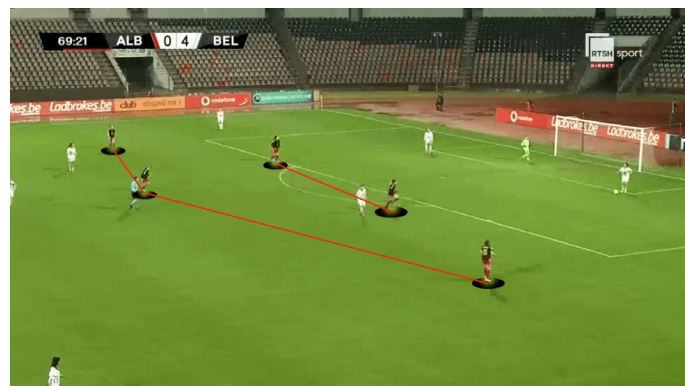

These same principles occur when the opposition are progressing from build-up to consolidated possession. The wingers are positioned narrower, more in the half-spaces, to solidify the central channel. As the opposition play the ball into the wide channel, the ball-side winger will shift across to press. Meanwhile, the far-side winger will drop in towards the holding midfielder to provide cover and balance.

The figure below is an example of this against Russia in the 2022 Pinatar Cup final. As the ball moves into the widest channel, the right-winger begins to move wider, with Belgium's left-winger dropping deeper into the midfield.

In the eleven international fixtures Belgium have played in 2021/22, they've conceded 6 goals from an xGA of 8.7. The figure below shows the locations of 38 non-penalty shots conceded by Serneels' side in their last five fixtures. Shots on target are marked by a black dot, while shots off

target or blocked are marked with a black cross. Belgium have only conceded one non-penalty goal (NPG) in their last five games, with that NPG coming from a long Kosovo free-kick into the box that was controlled and finished.
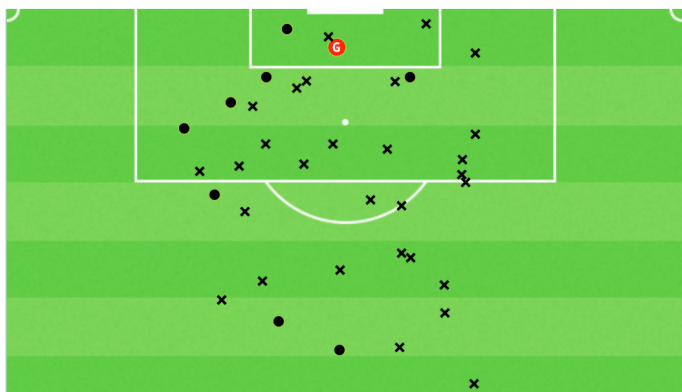

We can see that most of the shots on target conceded by Belgium are located on the right side of their defence. However, right centre-back Amber Tysiak missed some games through injury, meaning the defence was rotated and even included midfielders at centre-back in the latter stages of games, so perhaps this was deliberately targeted by their opposition. A potential weakness to Belgium's defence that could potentially be targeted at the Euros is their defending at the back post, although their overall aerial duel success is adequate.

TRANSITIONS

From their more expansive attacking shape, Belgium requires lots of movement in transitions to get back into their narrow and compact defensive shape. The full-backs available to Serneels seem to have the required recovery pace to track back after advancing to influence attacking play. The holding midfielder is usually the most active in defensive transitions, alongside the ball-side winger and/or player who lost possession.

The holding midfielder is essential to the Red Flames defensively and in transitions. With her movement rarely ahead of the ball, she is often well positioned in rest defence to engage with

opposition ball-carriers, whilst occupying spaces to shield the centre-backs. This disciplined positioning out of possession facilitates their ability to cover ground and successfully tackle and outmuscle opposition, qualities that Belgium's holding midfielder options all possess.
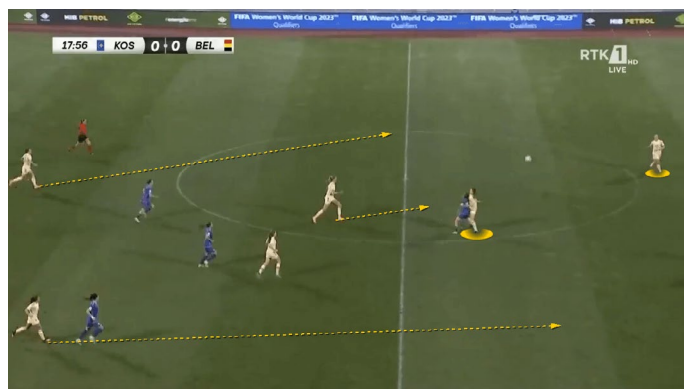
When facing opposition that play with a lone striker, Belgium will sometimes brazenly stick a centre-back on the striker. Man-marking the striker, the centre-back will grab and prevent the striker from turning to chase balls in behind. Blocking their run, the other centre-back can sweep behind so Belgium can regain possession from defensive transitions.

Due to their narrow out-of-possession shape, Belgium's direct counter-attacks tend to be central; the Red Flames will typically attempt to pass up towards the striker within two passes of the regain.

Depending on location, this pass could be a short pass over five yards, a longer pass to feet for the striker to hold up or turn and attack, or a ball in behind the opposition defence to flip them. However, after regaining possession in their defensive third, Belgium are comfortable enough to retain and build from the back to progress.

FORWARDS

As mentioned earlier, Wullaert and Eurlings are expected to be Belgium's starting strike partnership. However, Serneels does have options beyond those two, with Tenerife's Jassina Blom and Anderlecht's Ella Van Kerkhoven providing proven ability to score goals when entrusted with doing so, whether that be starting centrally or out wide. Also selected in the provisional squad are younger options alongside Eurlings (19 years old), with Davinia Vanmechelen, Jarne Teulings, and Jill Janssens all under 23 years old and capable of playing in midfield.

MIDFIELDERS

With Belgium's versatility, midfield is an area with depth. Biesmans, Vanhaevermaet, and Onzia have been discussed as options already, but Anderlecht's Marie Minnaert provides a riskier option in possession — she's always looking forwards to break lines through dribbling or passing. The rest of their options have struggled for minutes recently due to such tough competition for places, with younger players from OH Leuven like Marie Detruyer and Zenia Mertens battling with Kassandra Missipo, Chloe Vande Velde, and Charlotte Tison, who are regularly called up to squads.

DEFENDERS

In defence, we expect a starting back four of Deloose, Tysiak, De Neve, and Philtjens. These are the four most capped defenders called up by Serneels in Belgium's provisional squad, but they provide more than just experience. With a suitable centre-back balance of progressive actions in possession and ability to regain when out of possession, full-back Deloose gives a ball-carrying option. Isabelle Iliano will be back-up to left-back Philtjens, with Sari Kees, Shari Van Belle, and Jody Vangheluwe also back-up options selected in the provisional squad.

BEST PERFORMER

Attacking metrics	Per 90	Percentage
Non-penalty goals per 90	0.33	65.3
xG per 90	0.24	42.3
Touches in box per 90	3.94	69.2
Shots per 90	1.60	34.6
Shots on target, %	33.33%	23
Assists per 90	0.00	3.8
Offensive duels per 90	6.91	15.3
Offensive duels won, %	43.08%	81.3
Dribbles per 90	2.87	10
Successful dribbles, %	66.67%	95.3
Head goals per 90	0.00	3.8

Passing metrics	Per 90	Percentage
Accurate forward passes, %	66.98%	84.60
Passes per 90	38.83	96.10
Accurate passes, %	78.08%	80.70
Passes to final third per 90	4.47	92.30
Passes to penalty area per 90	5.11	96.10
Progressive passes per 90	7.02	96.10
Smart passes per 90	2.23	96.10
Key passes per 90	0.74	84.60
Through passes per 90	2.13	96.10
Long passes per 90	1.81	53.80
Average pass length, m	17.29	65.30

Defending metrics	Per 90	Percentage
Duels per 90	14.47	7.60
Duels won, %	44.85%	84.60
Aerial duels per 90	0.96	7.60
Aerial duels won, %	33.33%	34.60
Defensive duels per 90	3.72	30.70
Defensive duels won, %	40.00%	46.10
PAdj Interceptions	4.49	84.60
PAdj Sliding tackles	0.58	84.60
Shots blocked per 90	0	3.80
Fouls per 90	0.32	7.60
Fouls suffered per 90	0.74	53.80

The image here breaks down her domestic performances for the last calendar year and compares her statistics in each noted area with the league median. Notching up 15 goals and 10 assists for Belgium this season, Tessa Wullaert is remarkably averaging a goal involvement every 30 minutes. Essential to the Red Flames' attacking play, she is the best finisher and creator in the squad and will be vital to Belgium's attempts of getting out of the group stage.

Wullaert is right-footed but tends to occupy positions in the left half-space. Mainly starting as the left-sided striker, she has also been deployed on the left wing and on the left of a central midfield three. Wullaert is clinical in front of goal and aims to get into one-on-one situations with runs in behind the last defender. Able to time these runs correctly, she is composed under pressure and can convert these chances off both feet with clean technique. Wullaert is also alert to any potential opposition mistakes, with ability to remain focused as she unexpectedly regains possession and punishes the opponent's error. As a creator, Wullaert has a fruitful partnership with Tine De Caigny — she's often looking to find the Hoffenheim attacking midfielder. Drifting into wide positions, Wullaert can accurately deliver

lofted crosses and low cut-backs towards De Caigny, who usually times her run into the box expertly. When operating in central areas, she can combine with De Caigny with one-twos, and she's able to resist opposition pressure with her back to goal.

TOURNEMENT PREDICTIONS

Belgium, as the lowest-ranked nation in their group, will be hopeful of causing an upset to progress into the knockout stages. With their opening game against Iceland, there's an opportunity for the Red Flames to pick up three points and suddenly change their projection in this group. France, who are ranked 3rd in the world, have the quality to beat any nation and would be expected to overcome the Belgian threat. Their last group game against Italy could potentially be a group decider if Belgium can secure points in one or both of their first two fixtures. If Serneels' team can unexpectedly progress into the knockout stages, they would likely lose to Group C's Sweden or Netherlands, who are ranked 2nd and 5th in the world respectively, but this would still be a great achievement for the Red Flames in only their second European Championship.

This Belgium side has the potential to be really entertaining and if Serneels deploys his bold approach by committing players into the forward line, the Red Flames will have the quality and capacity to cause any opponent trouble. However, this can leave them exposed defensively, especially against such quality opponents. Although this will be entertaining for the neutrals and allow Belgium to cause upsets, it would not be surprising to see Serneels alter his style into something that looks to provide a bit more solidity, initially.

ICELAND:

GROUP D

OWEN BULLMAN // @BullmanOwen

Iceland have been drawn into Group D for this summer's European Championships along with Belgium, France and Italy. All sides rank in the top 20 of the FIFA world rankings, making it a potentially difficult group to navigate. Having qualified for a major international tournament for just the fourth time ever, Iceland will be looking forward to making a mark on the tournament. Previously, Iceland have only progressed out of the group stages once — in 2013, when they reached the quarter-finals. Manager Thorsteinn Halldórsson will be filled with confidence following a positive performance at this year's SheBelieves Cup, in which they finished second to the United States.

The Icelandic squad contains several talented and experienced players, such as Sara Björk Gunnarsdóttir of Olympique Lyonnais, Dagny Brynjarsdóttir of West Ham and veteran midfielder Gunnhildur Yrsa Jónsdóttir from Orlando Pride. These key players will have vital contributions to make for whatever Iceland go on to achieve this summer. Several young players will be hoping to make an impact on their performance. Goalkeeper Cecilía Rán Rúnarsdóttir who has recently joined Bayern Munich and tricky winger Sveindis Jane Jónsdottir who has had an outstanding campaign with Wolfsburg.

The team qualified relatively comfortably by finishing second in the qualification group. Along with this, Iceland only lost once and finished just three points behind first-placed Sweden. Iceland played group member Italy back in 2021 over two back to back games. The first was a 1-0 loss, the second a 1-1 draw. This fixture is certainly one that will be closely contested.

Head coach Thorsteinn Halldórsson has led his side to 15 wins and just two losses during his time in charge. Most recently, a runners-up finish in the SheBelieves Cup proved a huge triumph, with Iceland beating New Zealand and the Czech Republic on their way. Halldórsson has his side

playing with confidence and possesses a good mix of youth and experience heading into the Euros.

PREDICTED STARTING XI

Halldórsson has been very rigid in his starting formation, using the 4-3-3 for every game bar one in 2022. It's clear that the coach prefers the 4-3-3 over other formations as he gets a good balance between defensive coverage, midfield dominance and attacking prowess. He operates his side in a way that asserts themselves as the dominant team and controls possession.

Sandra Sigurdardóttir is likely to be the first-choice goalkeeper; the 35-year-old provides experience with 41 international caps.

Meanwhile, the second-choice keeper will be up-and-coming stopper Cecilía Rán Rúnarsdóttir who has recently moved to Bayern Munich. The 18-year-old has already represented her country 7 times, so don't be surprised if she ends up in between the goalposts at some stage. Glódis Perla Viggósdóttir and Gudny Arnadóttir could line up in the centre of defence, though the pairing is relatively young. Arnadóttir has spent the season on loan at Napoli. Veteran fullbacks Hallbera Gudny Gísladóttir on the left and Sif Atladóttir on the right will add experience and composure to the young centre-back pairing.

In the midfield, Sara Björk Gunnarsdóttir is set to captain the side. The two-time Champions League winner brings quality and excellent discipline to the midfield. In the centre, she will be joined by Dagny Brynjarsdóttir and either Gunnhildur Yrsa Jónsdóttir, Alexandra Jóhannsdóttir or Karólína Lea Vilhjálmsdóttir. Jónsdóttir is 33 now and her minutes seem to be managed well by Halldórsson. The last 2 of the potential 3 both play their football in Germany and bring youthful energy to the side. Onto the front line, which is led centrally by Berglind Björg Thorvaldsdóttir, who is joined by Sveindis Jane Jónsdottir on the right and Agla María Albertsdóttir on the left. Elín Metta Jensen is in serious contention for a starting position here as well. The 27-year-old has 16 international goals for the Icelandic national team — so is a significant goal threat. Halldórsson fills his squad with depth and adaptability. He has a range of different attackers and can use them to combat different opponents.

When looking at the age of the squad, its average is 26.4 years old. The squad has 6 players over the age of 30 and 7 under the age of 23. The age of the squad and experience is mixed well with 4 of the players having over 100 caps for their nation.
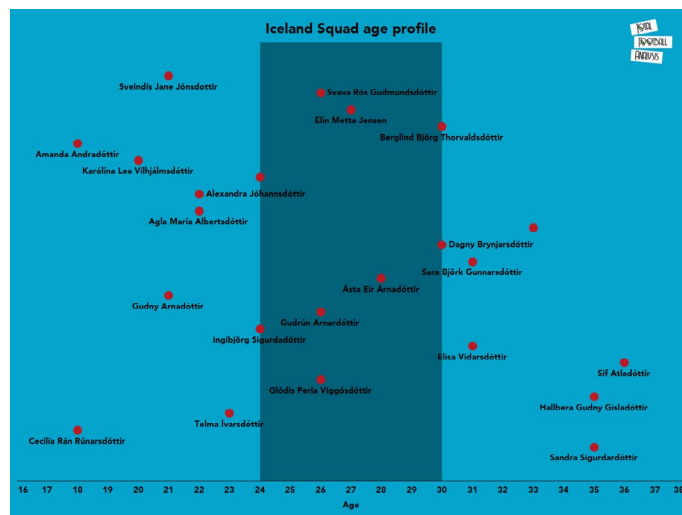
The graphic above is split into three sections, youth (aged 24 and under), peak (24 to 30) and experienced (30 and over). As seen, Iceland have a large mix of youth and experience. The squad does favour the youthful players slightly and the majority have played a high volume of minutes. The youthfulness of the squad mixed well with those at their peak will be helpful in the way Iceland patiently play.

ATTACKING PHASE
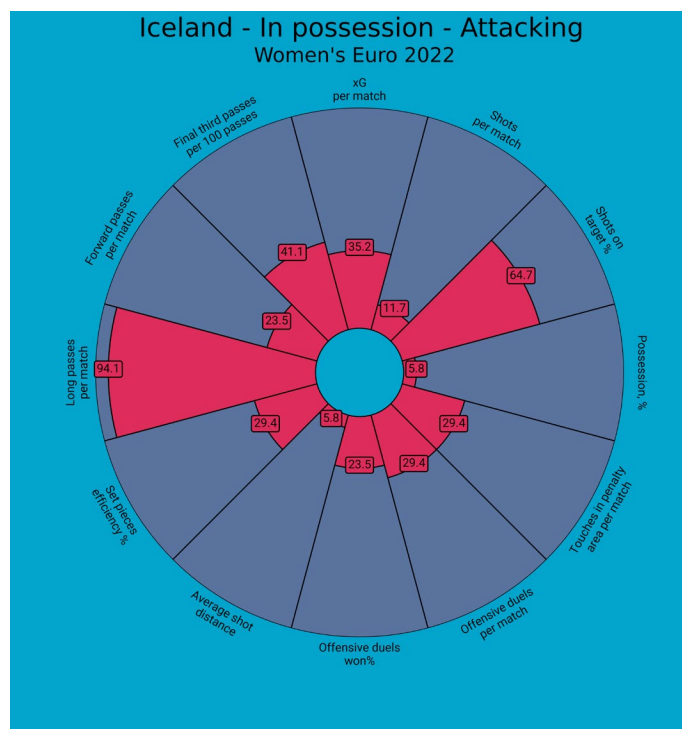
Iceland's attacking phase is fairly one-dimensional, with their long passes per match standing out massively on the graph. A clear

set way of playing has been drilled into them by boss Thorsteinn Halldórsson, this is evident as the other attacking areas seem to lack in the data. Iceland look to play long; by doing this, they avoid any high press that the opposition will attempt. The long ball tactic has been worked on as Iceland are great at positioning themselves perfectly to retain possession following a long pass. Another area in which Iceland have scored quite highly is their shot accuracy rate. Just under two-thirds of Iceland's shots are on target, which is a positive stat when it comes to scoring goals. Iceland frequently create good shooting opportunities which leads to a high percentage of shots on target.

A large emphasis is placed upon Iceland's midfield as it is arguably their strongest area on the pitch. However, the possession stats seem concerning when considering this. Iceland may benefit from setting up in a way that can allow for their experienced midfield to dominate and keep possession more comfortably. Along with this, Iceland's stat for forward passes is, again, worrying low. Now, this stat can be explained easier as it goes hand in hand with Iceland's long ball method. Whilst Iceland play one long direct pass, other teams may build up with four or five forwards passes, so this statistic can be slightly overlooked but must still be considered.

In their attacking phase, Iceland look to create clear-cut goal-scoring opportunities. This is done in several ways, most commonly via cutbacks. Below is shown how Iceland intend on getting into goalscoring positions. One player makes a run across the goal, dragging defenders with them. This, in theory, should create space towards the top of the penalty area for a midfield player to arrive and have a clear chance to score. If perfectly timed, this move can lead to lots of goals and is a positive tactic used by Iceland.
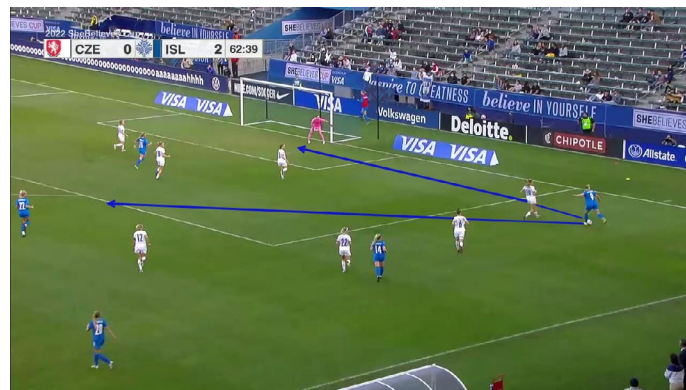
Another way that Iceland look to attack is via a long ball. As seen in the data, a long ball is something the Halldórsson's side is well used to. Iceland are effective at creating chancing following a long ball. By playing a long ball, Iceland look to quickly and directly progress play. Something which needs to be consistent is the number of supporting players around the target of the long ball. Getting support around the target allows for quick capitalisation of disruption to the opposition and can help exploit space which may have been discovered. Below is an example of how a simple setback following a long ball can create excellent goal-scoring chances.

Another huge part of Iceland's attacking phase is the team's renowned long throw. This is something the men's team made headlines for in previous years and I am certain at the 2022 Euros, the women's team will make it their own. Iceland can load the box with players and set it up like a corner kick. The long throw is something that Iceland have used very effectively in the past, scoring two goals from their long throw-ins in their last four games. By loading the box with their players Iceland look to aerially dominate teams and make the first contact. This tactic

causes drama and unrest for the opposition defenders — and is definitely something to watch out for in this tournament.

DEFENSIVE PHASE

Iceland have been very defensively solid since boss Halldórsson has taken over, keeping eight clean sheets in their last 10 matches, including World Cup Qualification matches and the SheBelieves Cup; they boast an impressive defensive record which Iceland can pride themselves on and is a great base to build a successful team upon. Looking at the data, Iceland score highly in clearances and interceptions. These statistics can go directly down to Iceland's out-of-possession shape and discipline.

When defending from the front, Iceland do not press aggressively and much prefer to direct play to an area or space via their organised and disciplined shape. 'The recoveries in final third stat' ranking at such a low percentile shows Iceland are not a high pressing side. Below is an example of how Iceland set up when the ball is high up the pitch. The wingers occupy an opposition player and the striker directs play to force a longer or riskier pass.

Iceland set up in a 4-5-1 shape which is easily transitioned into from a 4-3-3 as the wingers drop deep to create a bank of 5 across the midfield. By operating in a 4-5-1, Iceland compact the central area of the pitch with the ability to match player-for-player alongside opposition midfielders. The 4-5-1 keeps Iceland compact and rigid. The three central midfield players monitor the space between the lines and one of them usually drops deeper to ensure protection for the back four.


The Iceland midfield is disciplined and good at disrupting play, the team score very highly on interceptions and recoveries in their own third, which proves how defensively solid they are. The recoveries in their own third stat at 88.2 emphasises how much Iceland focus on defending passively in the early stages of the

defensive phase and winning the ball back closer to their own goal when the opponent has been drawn forward. By almost disregarding the press, Iceland can regain their shape and make themselves difficult to break down.

A worrying sign of Iceland's defensive capabilities is their defensive duels numbers. Iceland have a very high percentile ranking for defensive duels per match, at 94.1. This stat is followed up by a very poor percentile of defensive duels won at 29.4 — a concerning stat for Iceland as teams may look to target them 1v1. With ageing fullbacks Hallbera Gudny Gísladóttir and Sif Atladóttir being 35 and 36, respectively, this is an area that should be monitored and watched.

TRANSITIONS

Iceland's offensive transition look to regain and sustain possession rather than catching the opposition with a quick counterattack. Once Iceland have the ball, they look to break forward but wait for support to ensure the safety of the ball. Below is an example of how Iceland choose to keep possession rather than attack quickly. Many teams would play the ball in behind for their striker to run onto but Iceland play the ball infield, which is a safer move.
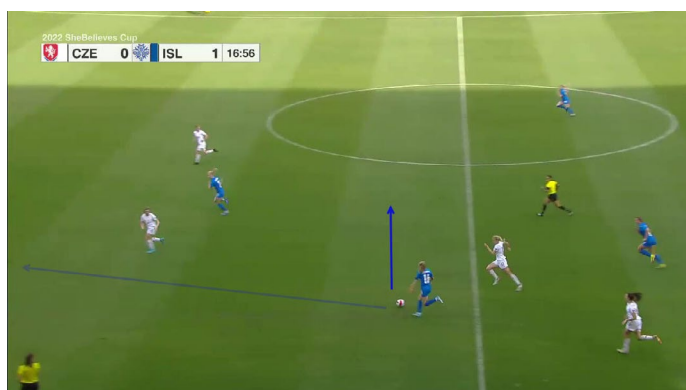
On defensive transition, Iceland are quite conservative and do not over-commit themselves to any challenges that could leave them exposed. As previously mentioned, Iceland are not a high-pressing side. Pictured is an example of how Iceland monitor the situation but do not

directly look to apply a huge amount of direct pressure to the situation.

FORWARDS

Iceland's attacking options will be made up of the likes of Berglind Björg Thorvaldsdóttir, Sveindis Jane Jónsdottir and Agla María Albertsdóttir. The attack features a very solid striker in Thorvaldsdóttir, who has found the net 10 times for her country. Along with the front three, another attacker who is in contention for a place is Elín Metta Jensen, who plays her football for the Icelandic team Valur. The 27-year-old has made 59 appearances for her country. With the pacey wingers in the side, Iceland certainly will pose a threat for most teams. Their wing play and link-up between the front three is something that can see them easily slice through defences.
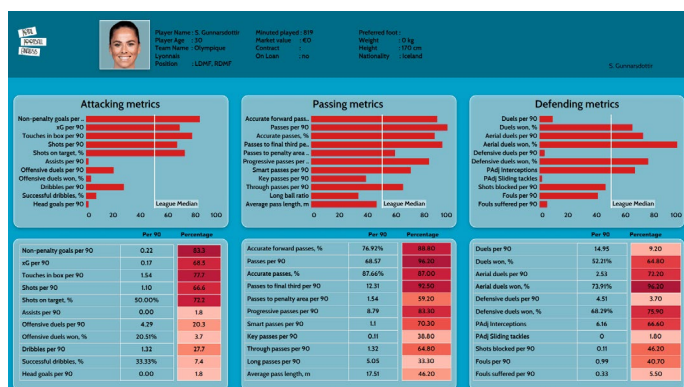
MIDFIELDERS

Iceland's midfield is arguably the strongest area in their squad, with five midfielders all in contention for starting in the midfield three. This consists of Champions League winner and captain Sara Björk Gunnarsdóttir, West Ham midfielder Dagny Brynjarsdóttir who likes to get on the ball and link play — her ability and calmness on the ball allow for Iceland to progress easily — and Brynjarsdóttir, who loves to demand the ball from her teammates, especially the central defenders; she is always an option to pass to.

DEFENDERS

The defence of Iceland is an area mixed with plenty of experience and youth. Defenders Glódis Perla Viggósdóttir, Hallbera Gudny Gísladóttir and Sif Atladóttir have over 300 international caps between them. This gives the Icelandic team a great base of experience to build upon. Then, 26-year-old Glódis Perla Viggósdóttir is a key part of the heart of the Icelandic defence. Young defender Gudny Arnadóttir is likely to complete the back four. Elísa Vidarsdóttir and Ingibjörg Sigurdadóttir provide cover for the defence; both could come into the back four comfortably.

BEST PERFORMER

Player Name: S. Gunnarsdottir — Minuted played: 819 — Preferred foot: — Player Age: 30 — Market value: €0 — Weight: 0 kg — Team Name: Olympique Lyonnais — Contract: — Height: 170 cm — Position: LDMF, RDMF — On Loan: no — Nationality: Iceland

Attacking metrics

	Per 90	Percentage
Non-penalty goals per 90	0.22	63.5
xG per 90	0.17	68.5
Touches in box per 90	1.54	77.7
Shots per 90	1.10	66.6
Shots on target, %	50.00%	72.1
Assists per 90	0.00	1.8
Offensive duels per 90	4.29	20.3
Offensive duels won, %	20.51%	3.7
Dribbles per 90	1.32	27.7
Successful dribbles, %	33.33%	7.4
Head goals per 90	0.00	1.8

Passing metrics

	Per 90	Percentage
Accurate forward passes, %	76.92%	88.80
Passes per 90	68.57	96.20
Accurate passes, %	87.66%	87.00
Passes to final third, %	12.31	92.50
Passes to penalty area per 90	1.54	59.20
Progressive passes per 90	8.79	83.30
Smart passes per 90	1.1	70.30
Key passes per 90	0.11	38.80
Through passes per 90	1.32	64.80
Long passes per 90	5.05	33.30
Average pass length, m	17.51	46.20

Defending metrics

	Per 90	Percentage
Duels per 90	14.95	9.20
Duels won, %	52.21%	64.80
Aerial duels per 90	2.53	73.20
Aerial duels won, %	73.91%	96.20
Defensive duels per 90	4.51	3.70
Defensive duels won, %	48.29%	75.90
PAdj Interceptions	6.16	64.60
PAdj Sliding tackles	0	1.80
Shots blocked per 90	0.11	46.20
Fouls per 90	0.99	40.70
Fouls suffered per 90	0.33	5.50

Sara Björk Gunnarsdóttir has been at the top of the women's game for several years. Playing regularly in the Lyon midfield is no easy feat and the tenacious midfielder has an outstanding all-around game. There is no doubt that Gunnarsdóttir will be key to Iceland's success in this competition. The midfielder has recently come back from maternity leave early to ensure her fitness for this summer's competition.

Attacking-wise, the Lyon midfielder is far above the league average in key areas such as touches in the box per 90, shots per 90 and percentage of shots on target. Her ability to take chances and become an attacking threat from central midfield is something that Iceland must allow her to do. The ability to have a midfielder with high attacking output is of huge value, especially in tournament games when ties can be close. Sara Björk Gunnarsdóttir has 22 international goals in 138 appearances.

Possession-wise, again, Sara Björk Gunnarsdóttir is outstanding — scoring way above average in eight out of the 11 metrics measured on our graph. The ability to progress play forward into the final third and penalty area will enable Iceland to have that cutting edge when breaking sides down. The percentage of accurate forward passes is a key area which should be highlighted; scoring a score of 76.92%, Gunnarsdóttir is certainly capable of controlling a game.

Finally, Gunnarsdóttir's defensive stats. Again an area of high class, especially aerially. Gunnarsdóttir ranks almost above everyone else in her league on the percentage of aerial duels won per 90. She will add some defensive steel and discipline to the side. She ranks extremely well for interceptions, highlighting her ability to read the game and play defensively in a system.

TOURNAMENT PREDICTIONS

Iceland find themselves in a difficult group, competing with France, Italy and Belgium. A win in their first game against Belgium will put them in a strong position to progress. The game to focus on for Iceland will be the Italy game. Italy and Iceland will both be confident of gaining the runners-up spot. France are clear favourites for the group but don't write Iceland off. If they progress by finishing as runners-up, they will face Group C winners — likely to be the tournament holders, Netherlands or FIFA's world number 2, Sweden. Advancing to the knockout stage of the tournament would be a great success for Iceland, and this is where they will aim to progress to.

ITALY:

GROUP D

ADAM SCULLY // @ascully24

The rise of calcio femminile is well and truly underway. Having qualified for their first Women's World Cup finals in two decades over three years ago, Italy will compete among Europe's finest in the Women's European Championships this summer.

Partaking in the 2019 World Cup elevated women's football to new heights in Bel Paese. A study completed by PricewaterhouseCoopers estimated that the number of female football players in Italy grew by 13.9% since the last World Cup while Serie A viewing figures rose by 25% within just 12 months after the esteemed competition ended.

Le Azzurre reached the quarter-final before being knocked out by the eventual finalists Holland. However, their participation leaves an everlasting effect on the popularity of women's football in the country.

Fast forward to 2022, Italy reached the final of the Algarve Cup, proving that the side is not just there to make up the numbers, although they were unfortunately beaten by Sweden on penalties.

Since the turn of the Century, the Italian women's national team had seen some dreadful displays in international competitions. Underperformance after underperformance after underperformance plagued the side's history.

In 2017, the Italian FA made one of the wisest choices of the past decade in an era of naïve managerial decisions across all levels and genders of international football in the country. Milena Bertolini was appointed as the head coach, replacing the former Juventus fullback, Antonio Cabrini.

A pioneer for football in the country, Bertolini has made Italy competitive once more on the international stage, playing beautiful football in the process.

Ranked 14th in the world at the moment, Italy are the bookies' ninth-favourite to win the competition in its entirety and so are certainly outsiders, but if football history has thought us anything, it's that you do not write off the Italians. You can certainly not write off Bertolini's team.

PREDICTED STARTING XI

Bertolini has been rather consistent with her use of the same players within her preferred 4-3-3 system. The Italian boss ensures that her starting XI has plenty of quality players comfortable on the ball, with lots of energy to execute a high press, while also being quite adept in their defensive duels.

Italy have also used a 3-4-3 under Bertolini over the past calendar year. However, it's likelier that the Azzurre will set up in a 4-3-3 as it suits the players available.

Total Football Analysis predicts that this will be Italy's first-choice starting XI for the Euros if all of their best players are available.
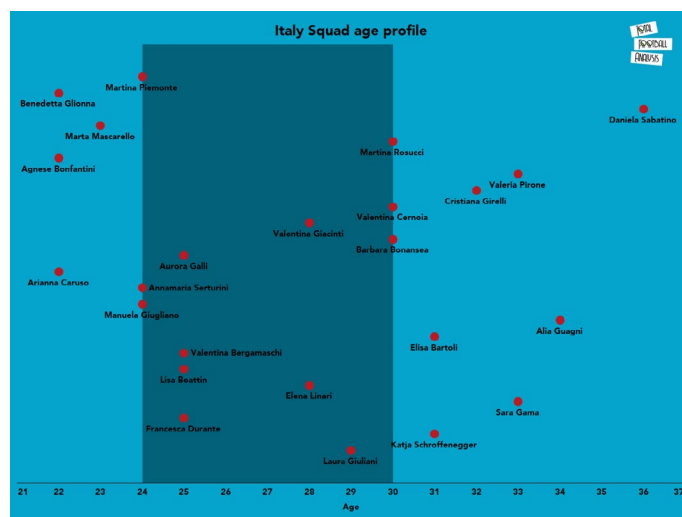
Overall, Italy's squad is mixed quite well. There are a lot of players on the wrong side of 30 that may be playing in their final major tournament for their country, especially Alia Guagni, Daniela Sabatino, Gama, and Valeria Pirone.

Nevertheless, the age profile of the squad shows that Bertolini does prefer well-established players in the squad. There are only three players under the age of 24 that will be in the team for Le Azzurre. There are also no players under the age of 21.

The majority of the players are still in their peak years with many spilling over into their 30s. In fact, the average age of Italy's squad for the Euros is 27.9.

The most striking aspect of this starting XI is how much experience is present within the squad, blended with youthful vibrance. Players such as Sara Gama, Valentina Cernoia, Laura Giuliani, Barbara Bonansea, and Cristiana Girelli will be looked towards to lead the group given their wealth of experience in the blue shirt.

Meanwhile, others such as Valentina Bergamaschi, Lisa Boattin, Manuela Giugliano, Aurora Galli and Arianna Caruso will bring energy to the team, particularly in the middle of the park and flanking the central defenders, giving a really good balance to Bertolini's preferred starting lineup.

ATTACKING PHASE

Italy - In possession - Attacking
Women's Euro 2022
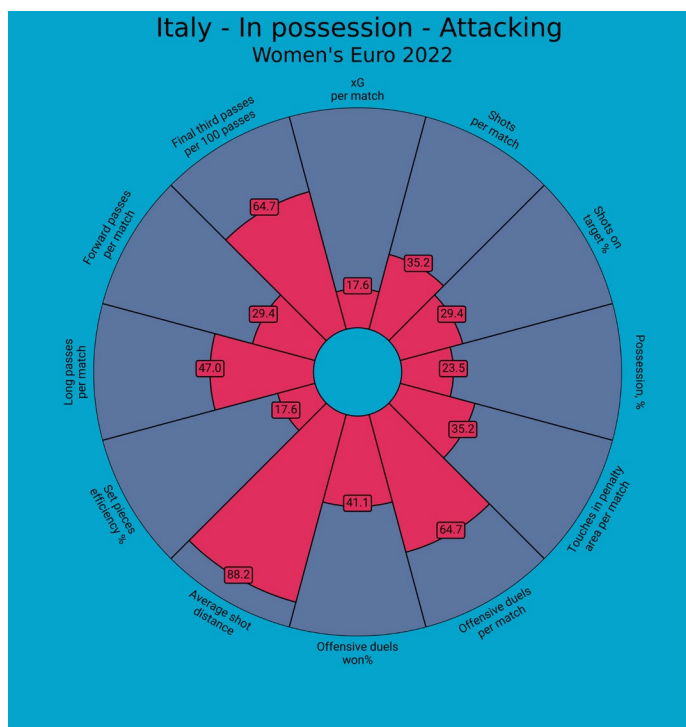
Like their male counterparts, Italy's women's team are quite possession-oriented, looking to build their way through the thirds with short passing as opposed to going long to the centre-forward.

Unfortunately, given the wealth of incredibly possession-based, attacking teams that are set to compete in England this summer at the Euros, Italy rank below average in the percentiles for most offensive metrics. However, this is an unfair representation of how Bertolini wants her side to play, which is on the front foot, in control of games, looking to create a high volume of chances.

Over the past calendar year, Le Azzurre have averaged 57.67% of the ball in their games in all official competitions. Across the Women's Euros qualifying campaign, Bertolini's battlers averaged 64.6% ball possession, which was the ninth-highest on the continent.

Along with being a possession-furious team, Italy have usurped all the stereotypical functions

of a ball-oriented side, including the emphasis from the side-lines that the players play out from the back, using the goalkeeper in the build-up.

The Italians are quite risky during the first phase of their attacks. Playing out from deep, Italy position their two centre-backs wider, often just at the edge of the penalty area, while the fullbacks move much higher up. This facilitates the goalkeeper becoming a third player in the first line.
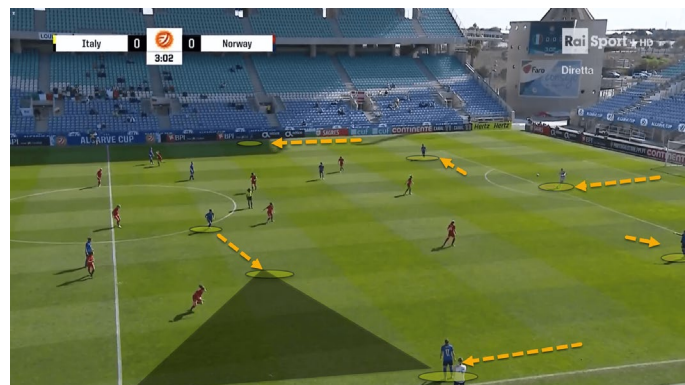
As Italy mainly employ a 4-1-4-1, their structure comprises of one single pivot positioned behind the opposition's first line of pressure while the more advanced '8s' push up between the lines, dropping to the ball-side to create a triangle with the fullback and winger.

Italy are really patient on the ball too. The passing rate metric measures how many passes a team makes per minute of possession. In the Euros qualifying campaign, the Azzurre boasted a passing rate of 13.9 — the seventh-highest across all teams.

The Italians try and progress the ball through the central areas as much as possible from these deeper areas of the pitch. They plan to break through the opponent's first pressing line and play the ball into the feet of their central midfielders.
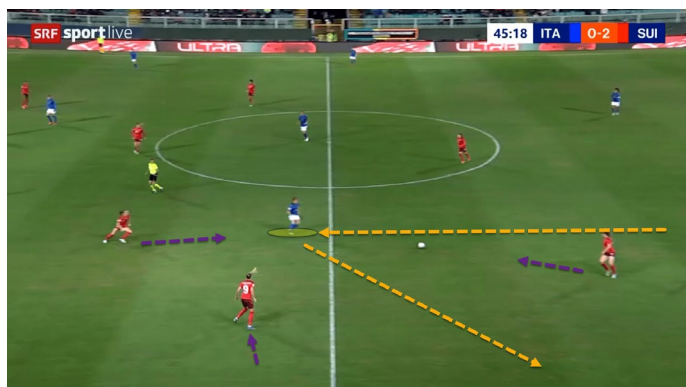
When this occurs, naturally the opponent will jump on the ball receiver while the midfield line narrows itself to block off any passes to the space between the lines. From there, these midfielders can act as a 'wall pass' and bounce the ball out to the fullbacks in space.

Since the opponent's midfield narrowed to cut off access to the players between the lines, the fullback can receive the ball relatively unscathed and drive forward to progress Italy into their attacking half.
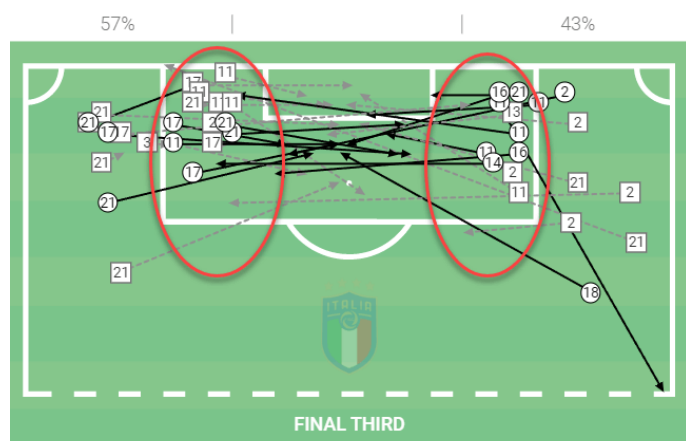

Further up the pitch, when Italy have more consolidated possession well inside their own half, the players look to reach the final third in two different ways.

Firstly, Bertolini instructs her players to create wide overloads down the flanks, using quick combination play and movement to break down the opposition's defensive block.

Wide overloads are a marvellous and effective way to break down a team's deep defensive block once you have a lot of quality wide players as the aim is to get the fullbacks or wingers into good crossing positions.

However, wide overloads are also less risky than trying to play through the middle as, in case of a turnover of possession, the team can defend transitions easier since the opponent has less room to play in, over on the flanks.

Italy rely heavily on crosses to create goalscoring opportunities. Over the past calendar year, the side have averaged 20.2 crosses per 90 in all competitions with an accuracy of 37.6%.

One area that Italy like to get into and cross is between the edge of the six-yard box and the 18-yard box.

Successful   Unsuccessful

From these positions, Bertolini's side look to create cut-back crosses similarly to Pep Guardiola's Manchester City as they can create

160

high xG chances from these crosses. Especially with Valentina Cernoia, the Azzurre could cause serious damage with these crosses, depending on whether the 30-year-old plays on the right or left.

On average, Italy are accumulating an xG of 2.37 per 90, bagging 2.9 goals per 90 and so are actually overperforming their xG stats over the last 12 months, which is certainly impressive.

Cristiana Girelli has been one of the main factors behind this overperformance. The experienced striker is incredibly dangerous around the box and has bagged nine goals from an xG of 7.99 to make her the sixth-highest goalscorer in the qualifying campaign.

DEFENSIVE PHASE
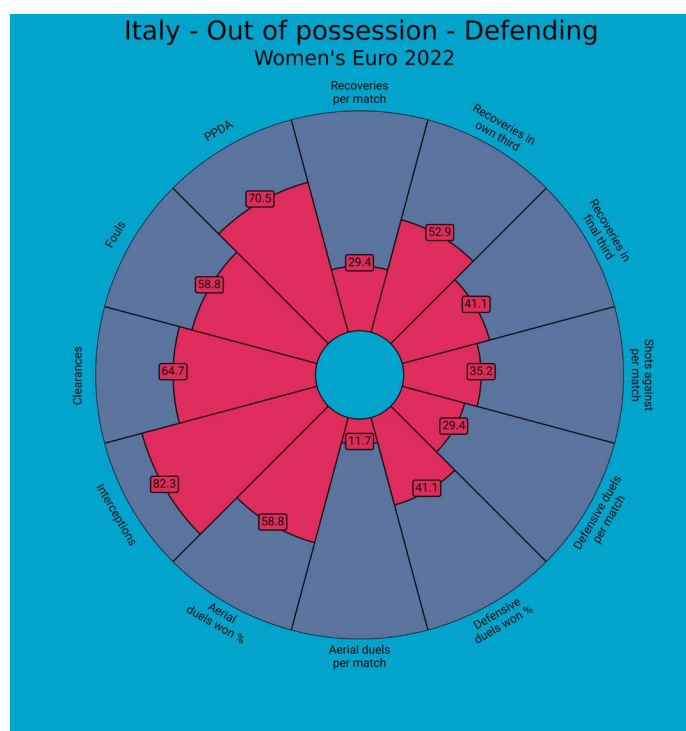
Italy are undoubtedly one of the highest pressing teams in European football under Bertolini. The women's team can be relentless at times, averaging a PPDA of 6.82 over the past calendar year. This was even lower during the Euros qualifying campaign, with the Italians boasting a PPDA of 5.95 in this period of matches.

They ranked as the eighth-lowest team on this metric. When it comes to PPDA, the lower the number, the more a side presses as the opponent is allowed to make fewer passes.

In correlation to their PPDA, Le Azzurre's challenge intensity stands at 7.5, meaning that Italy are making 7.5 defensive actions per minute of opposition possession which proves their aggression during the defensive phases and in the high press.

Italy press zonally. Essentially, when their opponent is passing out from the back, the centre-forward will angle her run, cutting off access to the other central defender to force the team to one side of the pitch.

The centre-forward needs to work hard to ensure that the centre-back cannot switch to their partner to maintain Italy's pressing structure.

Once the switch of play is blocked off and the attacking side are trapped on one side of the pitch, the nearest pressers get tight to the closest players in their zones, going aggressively man-oriented to try and regain possession of the ball.

Italy commit many bodies in the press too. This strategy is high-risk, high-reward. Being

combative with their high pressure gives them a greater opportunity to win the ball with their tight approach in the attacking third which could lead to a seamless attacking transition in a great area.

However, Italy's defensive structure has deficiencies once the offensive side plays over the press instead of attempting to go through it. Often, the centre-backs can be exposed and are forced into 1v1 duels.
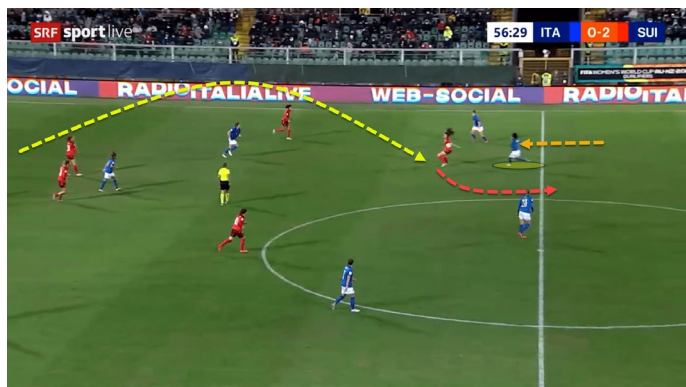
In this example, Switzerland went long to avoid Italy's tenacious pressing, but it left the team's captain and legendary calcio femminile Sara Gama to step up very high to try and close down the ball-receiver. Unfortunately for Gama, the Swiss striker turned her like she wasn't there and set her side through on goal.

These 1v1 situations that Italy find themselves in after a team plays long against them aren't a lottery. Le Azzurre have won 67.4% of the defensive duels that they have competed in over the past calendar year and so more often than not, they do win their duels. However, if the opposition's forwards have a lot of quality, having your centre-backs isolated in this way could cause serious problems.

Most of Italy's defensive duels occur rather high up the pitch as well, as Bertolini's side want to keep the opposition as far away from their defensive third as possible. For instance, here is an example of all of the team's defensive duels from a recent clash against Switzerland:
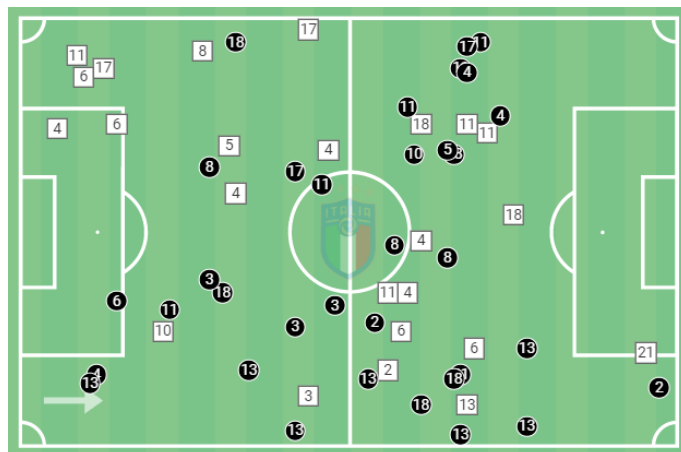
The emphasis from the touchline for the players to try and regain possession of the ball in the wide areas is particularly evident.

Italy aren't perfect but in keeping in line with their true Catenaccio heritage, the team conceded an average of just 0.47 goals per 90 across the Euros qualifying campaign. Their total xGA over the past calendar year has reached 0.6 per 90. In contrast to the team's 2.37 xG per 90, Italy's expected goal difference is an exemplary 1.77 per 90.

TRANSITIONS

Maintaining their high octane, pressing approach during the settled defensive phases, Italy also counterpress very aggressively to win back possession of the ball and frustrate opposition counterattacks.

Their use of wide overloads helps to facilitate this. With the use of the touchline, it's much easier to counterpress out wide than in the more central areas because the opponent has limited space to pass and run into.

Here, Italy were able to counterpress Lithuania effectively, shutting off any progressive passing angles, limiting the space the player in possession had before eventually turning over possession and executing their own attacking transition.

Over the past calendar year, the Italians have averaged 86.9 ball recoveries per 90, putting them in one of the highest-ranking teams in Europe for this metric.

Their ball recovery positions can be quite dispersed all around the pitch but are predominantly in the middle to final third of the pitch. For example, the following data visual displays all of Italy's ball recoveries from the same recent outing against Switzerland.

Recoveries
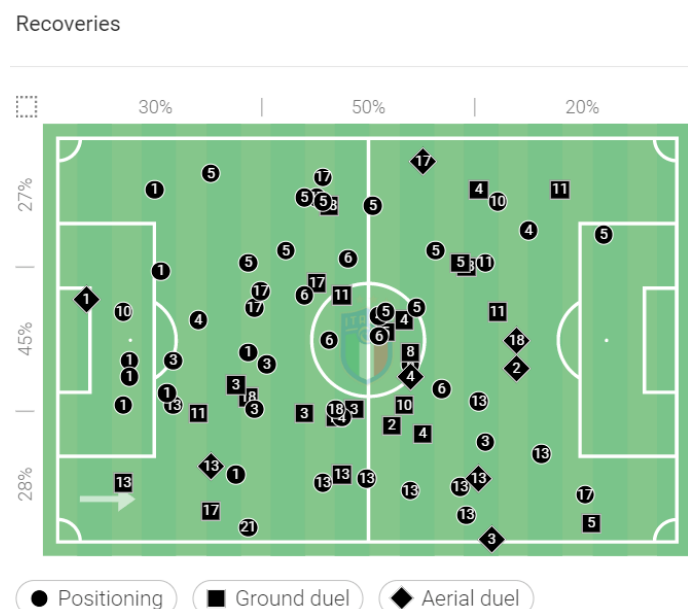
Attacking transitions are less common for the side. Bertolini's girls have averaged 2 counterattacks per 90 over the past twelve months in all competitions, with 50% of those ending in a shot on goal.

Generally, when hitting teams on the break, Le Azzurre try to reach the centre-forward first to hold up the ball and then link in runners in behind.
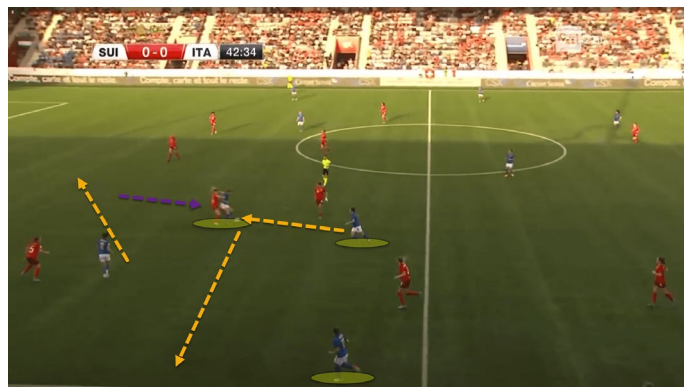
The centre-forward has to be comfortable with the ball at her feet and when she drops during transitions, it drags the opposition's defenders out of position, leaving space to be exploited in behind.

Normally, when one thinks of counterattacks, you may be forgiven for thinking about a José Mourinho-esque low block, with all 11 players parked behind the ball, breaking from deep and reaching the final third within ten seconds of winning the ball.

However, with Italy, their counterattacks start much higher up the pitch than this. As displayed in the previous section, Bertolini's side battle most of their defensive duels high up the pitch, inside the middle to final third and so these are the areas where their counterattacks also begin, through high pressing situations or else ball recoveries.
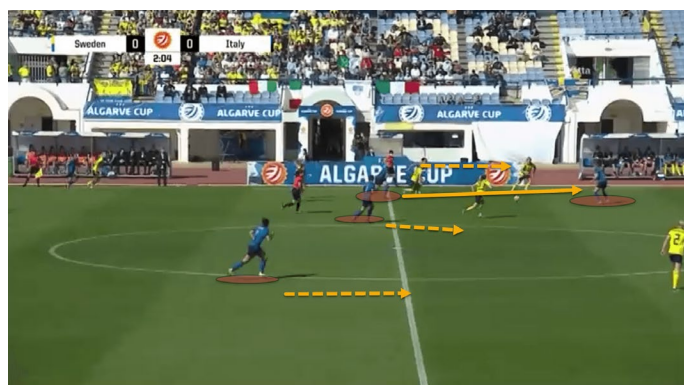
FORWARDS

Both Barbara Bonansea and Cristiana Girelli are now on the wrong side of 30, and as a

result, this could be one of their last tournaments to make an impact on the international stage in tournament football.

Italy's forward line is quite stacked, all things considered. While they may not possess as much quality as a team like England, Spain or the Netherlands in the forward department, Bertolini's side are still stacked with quality.

The wide areas are stockpiled with quality with players such as Valentina Cernoia battling it out with Valentina Giacinti for a starting spot in the team. To complete the treble of Valentinas, fullback Valentina Bergamaschi could also potentially start as a right-winger if needed and has done on several occasions for Le Azzurre, providing more defensive capabilities down this flank if necessary.

Meanwhile, just behind Bonansea in the pecking order over the opposite side will be Juventus' young star Agnese Bonfantini, although Cernoia and Giacinti can perform well on the left as well. Annamaria Serturini can potentially play on the left flank too if called upon.

Up front will undoubtedly be Girelli, Italy's top goalscorer over the last calendar and the woman who scored the most goals for the team throughout the Euros qualifying campaign. However, as backup to the 32-year-old will be someone one year her senior: Roma's Valeria Pirone. She could provide rotation for the star striker, or possibly even the more youthful Martina Piemonte who will certainly be hungry to get in ahead of Girelli.

MIDFIELD

Bertolini's preferred midfield trio over the past year has been Manuela Giugliano operating as the lone pivot, sitting behind two advanced midfield number '8s' in Aurora Galli and Caruso,

giving the middle of the park some a nice blend of Turin and Roman quality with a dash of Merseyside.

Beyond her preferred midfield, Bertolini will be able to rely on some high-quality midfielders such as Juventus' Martina Rosucci, Roma's Annamaria Serturini and the vibrant Marta Mascarello. However, apart from Giugliano, Galli, Caruso and Rosucci, no player made more than two appearances throughout the qualifying campaign.

Bertolini has trust in her core players and has proven herself to be rather iffy about rotating players within the team's core. It's highly unlikely that much rotation will be seen in the Euros either.

DEFENCE

Italy's defence is very much similar to the men's side with there being several players over the age of 30 who start almost all of the matches. 33-year-old captain, Sara Gama, is almost a guaranteed starter for the Azzurre, alongside her usual partner Elena Linari.
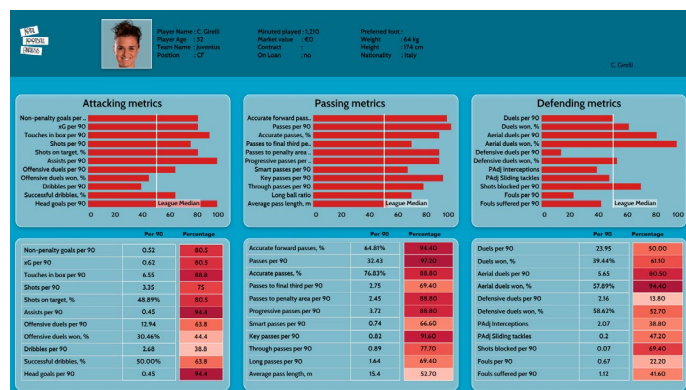
There will be quite an intense battle at right-back for the starting berth. Stalwart Elisa Bartoli played in every game during Italy's qualifying campaign for the prestigious competition. Regardless, Valentina Bergamaschi was one of the best players in Serie A last season, predominantly playing in the midfield for AC Milan Women.

Bergamaschi is a much-more attacking option than Bartoli and so gives Bertolini the possibility to switch to a back three, putting her on the right as a wingback while also offering solid defensive support. However, Bartoli is a more defensively secured option for games where Italy are forced to defend and be extra pragmatic.

At left-back, Lisa Boattin practically has the position on lockdown at the moment, although

Bertolini could potentially even call upon the veteran defender Alia Guagni as Italia so often have done over the years. This will likely be Guagni's final ever tournament for her country and she'll be hoping to bow out with success.

BEST PERFORMER

Player Name: C. Girelli	Minutes played : 1,210	Preferred foot :
Player Age : 32	Market value : €0	Weight : 64 kg
Team Name : Juventus	Contract :	Height : 174 cm
Position : CF	On Loan : no	Nationality : Italy

C. Girelli

Attacking metrics

	Per 90	Percentage
Non-penalty goals per 90	0.52	80.5
xG per 90	0.62	80.5
Touches in box per 90	6.55	88.8
Shots per 90	3.35	75
Shots on target, %	48.89%	80.5
Assists per 90	0.45	94.6
Offensive duels per 90	12.94	63.8
Offensive duels won, %	30.46%	44.4
Dribbles per 90	2.68	38.8
Successful dribbles, %	50.00%	63.8
Head goals per 90	0.45	94.6

Passing metrics

	Per 90	Percentage
Accurate forward passes, %	64.81%	94.40
Passes per 90	32.43	97.20
Accurate passes, %	76.83%	88.80
Passes to penalty area per 90	2.45	88.80
Progressive passes per 90	3.72	88.80
Smart passes per 90	0.74	66.60
Key passes per 90	0.01	91.60
Through passes per 90	0.89	77.70
Long passes per 90	1.44	69.40
Average pass length, m	15.4	52.70

Defending metrics

	Per 90	Percentage
Duels per 90	23.95	50.00
Duels won, %	39.44%	61.10
Aerial duels per 90	5.65	80.50
Aerial duels won, %	57.89%	94.40
Defensive duels per 90	2.16	13.80
Defensive duels won, %	58.62%	52.70
PAdj Interceptions	2.07	38.80
PAdj Sliding tackles	0.2	47.20
Shots blocked per 90	0.07	69.40
Fouls per 90	0.67	22.20
Fouls suffered per 90	1.12	41.60

Italy have a star-studded squad heading into the Euros this summer. However, the standout player is undoubtedly Cristiana Girelli who will be vital for Le Azzurre's chances of progressing deep in the tournament.

Throughout the Euros qualifying campaign for Italy, Girelli scored nine times and bagged three assists, bringing her goal contributions tally to 12 in total across the 10 matches.

In all competitions this season, including her appearances for Juventus in Serie A, Girelli has averaged 0.75 goals per 90 as well as 0.33 assists per 90. Essentially, she averages more than one goal contribution per game which is incredibly impressive.

Girelli averaged 3.14 shots per 90 as well this season, with 54.2% hitting the target. Altogether, she accumulated an xG of 0.64 per 90 and so is actually overperforming her xG, proving Girelli's potency in front of the net.

The 32-year-old featured 30 times this season for club and country and put the ball into the net 23 times in total. Again, her goals will be absolutely vital for Bertolini's team should they have any hope of progressing to the latter phases of the Euros this summer.

TOURNAMENT PREDICTIONS

Italy were drawn into a relatively difficult group. France are one of the favourites to win the entire tournament and many expect them to top Group D outright.

Iceland and Belgium are two very good sides as well that possess a serious amount of quality and could certainly make life extremely gruelling for Le Azzurre in the first round of the competition. However, Italy's squad is much stronger overall and Bertolini's side are expected to go through at least in second place, behind the French.

Getting to the quarter-finals itself would be excellent for Italy and any further progress would be a fabulous achievement. While they may not be strong enough to reach the final or even the semi-final, Italy's women certainly will not be a side that should be underestimated and could potentially be a banana-skin opponent for any of the tournament's favourites.

FRANCE:

GROUP D

— LORIHANNA SHUSHKOVA // @LorihannaSh —

Having won all of their 12 games in all competitions since June 2021, France are entering the UEFA Women's EURO 2022 as one of the favourites to win the tournament outright, although that would be quite a challenge with the likes of the Netherlands, England, Sweden and Germany to compete with, all of whom are expected to go far in the competition.

France are drawn into Group D along with Belgium, Italy and Iceland. The team is full of stars that compete for some of the best European teams, and the coach Corinne Diacre has made sure to call up the best performing players while still trying to keep the balance in the squad and keep their chances high.

While the French Olympique Lyonnais have been the most successful club in European football, with seven Champions League titles, the international team are yet to win any big competition and will be looking to lift their first title this summer.

The manager, Diacre, who was appointed in 2017 has met a lot of controversy over the years, with her tactics and call-ups being constantly questioned and criticised. The same is valid for her EURO 2022 squad which reveals the absence of some players who have proven their qualities at club level over the last calendar year.

Players like Amandine Henry, Eugenie Le Sommer and Kheira Hamaroui are not present in the 23-player squad, although she will rely on many of their teammates from Lyon and PSG.

This tactical analysis in the form of a scout report examines France's tactics and explains how they are likely to set-up throughout the tournament.

PREDICTED STARTING XI

The team are most likely to employ their favoured 4-3-3 formation throughout the tournament, although they might occasionally switch to 4-1-4-1 if they require a quick change of strategy. When it comes to the starting XI, it is expected that Pauline Peyraud-Magnin would be the main contender for the goalkeeping spot.

The Juventus player isn't a regular starter for her club, but her displays whenever she has played have been impressive and made Diacre rely on her in France's last few games, during which time she conceded just five goals in 11 games.

It is expected that Ève Périsset will be employed in the right-back position, where she would try to split her responsibilities between defence and attack.

The right centre-back position is most probably reserved for Griedge Mbock Bathy, despite the manager having quite a few options in central defence; she brings balance as she provides defensive security while being able to get the ball out of the defence when in possession.

The captain Wendie Renard is expected to start in the left centre-back position, from where she can dictate play and support ball progression.

The Lyon defender Selma Bacha is about to start at left-back where she will be the more active full-back in attack. Bacha usually strolls forward and often occupies the opposition half, where she contributes with crossing attempts but also occasionally cuts inside.

The midfield three is expected to consist of Kenza Dali, Sandie Toletti and Grace Geyoro, who all have quite a lot of experience both for club and country. Toletti will be providing defensive support as she is one of the most reliable players in terms of direct challenges. Dali is more of an attack-minded player and will be looking to advance the ball and threaten the goal directly and indirectly. Her dribbling makes her successful in ball retention. Geyoro, on the other side, will be used more for her passing abilities as she can orchestrate play and initiate attacking movement with her passes.

The right-wing will be occupied by Delphine Cascarino, who can successfully advance on the flank through her dribbling and supplied the box with a high number of crossing attempts. On the left, we would see the PSG player Sandy Baltimore perform a similar role.

The key payer, Marie-Antoinette Katoto, will be France's main threat in front of goal. She had an excellent season with PSG, scoring 42 goals in all competitions.

Many of the players in Diacre's team are interchangeable and could be seen outside of their usual positions throughout the tournament, depending on the coach's strategy.
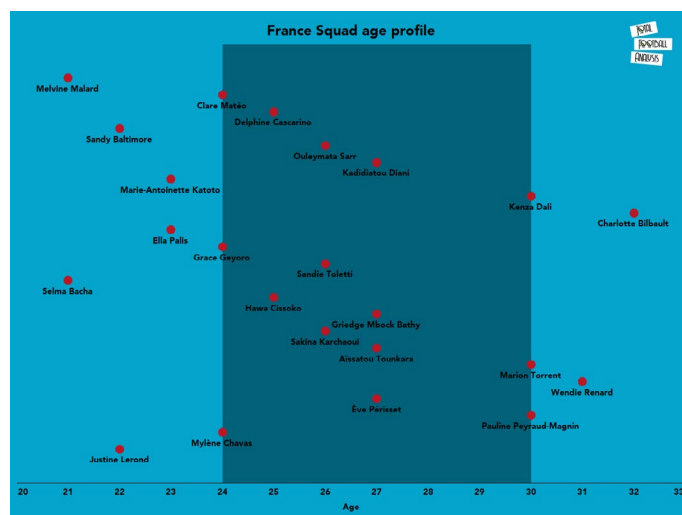

Looking at the team's age profile, we can see that France's squad has balance in terms of youth and experience. While Diacre has called up quite a few young talented players, she's stuck to having a foundation of more experienced players.

The scatter points out the young age of most of France's attackers, as two of the most regular starters up front, Katoto and Baltimore, are under 24 years old.

ATTACKING PHASE

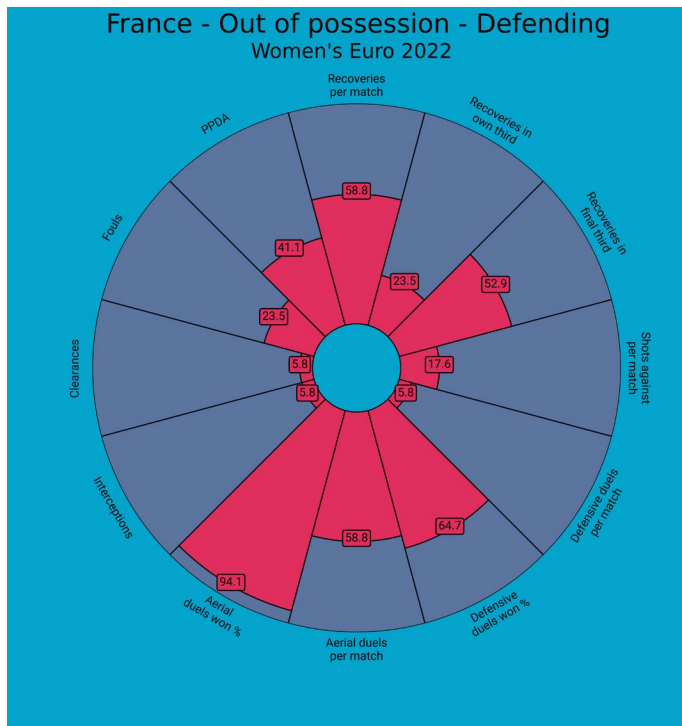France - In possession - Attacking
Women's Euro 2022

France are a possession-based team who constantly try to exploit the advanced areas and create chances. As the graph shows, the frequency of their attacking actions is high. They are successful in their offensive duels, which allows them to progress the ball efficiently. A high number of their passes are directed forward, which results in them producing an extremely high number of shots per 90.
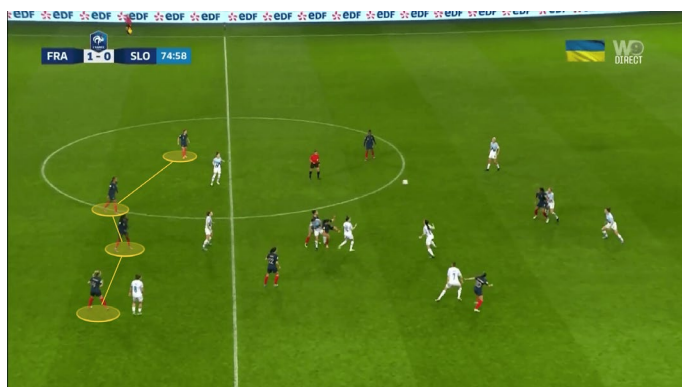

France overloading the opposition half.

The team try to build up from the back and rely heavily on delivering the ball to the box through crossing. While the wingers have the main responsibility for that, the full-backs also contribute, giving their fellow wide players more freedom to cut inside and provide an additional direct threat.
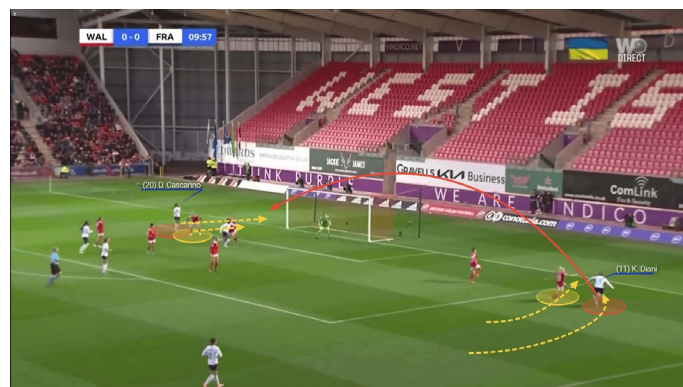
The team relying on crossing and having more players in the box to threaten the goal.

Due to their attacking nature and aim to control the game in the opposition half, they are often awarded attacking set-pieces which they can then try to take advantage of.

They struggle against teams that match their style, which affects their structure and build-up as they are more cautious defensively and drop deeper. They usually try to retain possession at the back which sometimes makes it easier for their opponents to block the passing lanes, resulting in France's lower efficiency in possession.

DEFENSIVE PHASE

They aim to recover the ball frequently and most of their efforts are focused on the advanced areas. That way, they not only manage to stop opposition attacks early on but also create even more chances in front of the goal.

Of course, their high positioning can make them more vulnerable, especially against pacey attackers who can sneak behind the defence. The French players also sometimes struggle under pressure. In cases when the opposition tries to overload the advanced areas and the defenders need to step out of position, it is difficult for their teammates to cover depth.

The team's defensive positioning.

France deploy a rather high defensive line against most teams but do drop it lower against more aggressive pressing teams. Due to their attacking style of play and aim to have more possession, they are rarely threatened defensively and most of the time, they control the game in the opposition half, which allows them to keep the ball away from their own goal. That's underlined by the low number of interceptions, clearances and defensive duels per 90. As the graphic shows, though, the team are successful in both their ground and aerial duels, which often is the reason for the low number of shots conceded.

One of the centre-backs had to cover the ball carrier and move away from her initial target, her teammates then failed to cover depth and mark the second player on the edge of the box, which left her uncovered and threatened the goal.

TRANSITIONS

Diacre's side prefer building up methodically and using their positioning to expose the opposition, rather than rely on counter-attacks. The team rely on a high pass frequency and aim to have more of the ball. They usually try to maintain a more advanced positioning and start their build-up-play by circulating the ball


France's highly positioned backline.

between the defenders. They most frequently spread out to the full-backs who can progress with it and then decide whether to bring it back centrally or play with width.
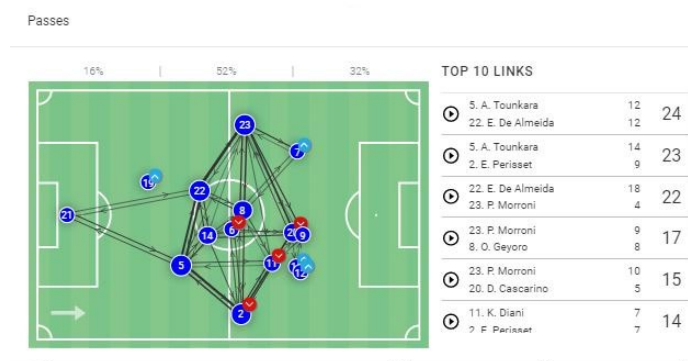
A pass map from one of France's games, showing the most frequent passing links and the average positions of the players.

While the central defenders are often responsible for ball progression, Tolleti's role is also important for the team as she supplies her teammate with forward passes. She can improve on her pass accuracy, though, as many times her attempts don't reach their target, which can result in a loss of possession.

Once the ball is past her, Geyoro could contribute with her creative passing and use her high pass completion rate to retain possession as she often relies on lateral passing. Dali could also pick up the ball from the central line and progress it further, and she is more likely to go all the way to the goal and attempt shooting.
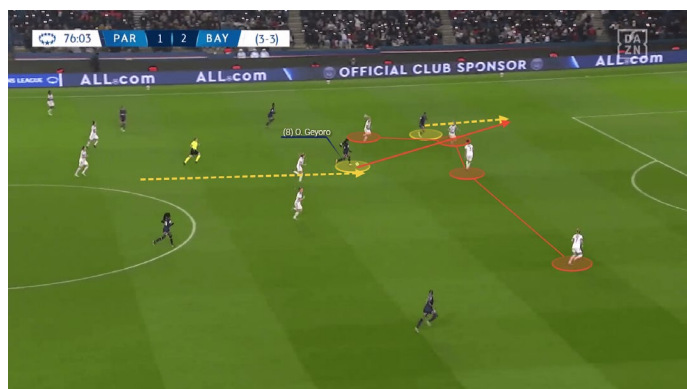
Geyoro advanced the ball successfully to the final third through her ball control and passing abilities.

FORWARDS

The coach has seven available attacking players. Apart from Katoto, Baltimore and Cascarino, who are expected to have the starting spots, there are Diani, Sarr, Matéo and Malard.

Diani could be a great replacement on the right as her dribbling allows her to go deep in the opposition half and take on defenders, while her frequent crossing attempts increase the team's chances to score. She can also provide a direct threat which makes her a great contender for a starting spot should any of her teammates not meet the expectations.
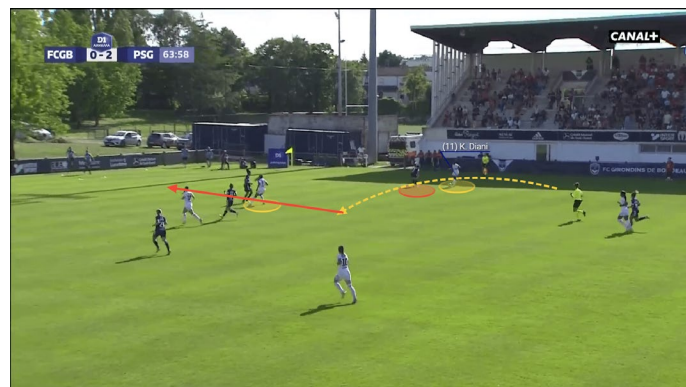
Diani dribbled past her marker and attempted a through ball to her teammate.

Sarr is more left-sided and has a slightly different role; she doesn't rely on crossing the ball, instead preferring to cut inside and create goalscoring chances with high shot frequency.

Matéo is another option for the right, while Malard seems to be the only player that could replace Katoto centrally. With a high shot frequency and shot accuracy, she is mainly focused centrally, where she tries to threaten the goal as frequently as possible.
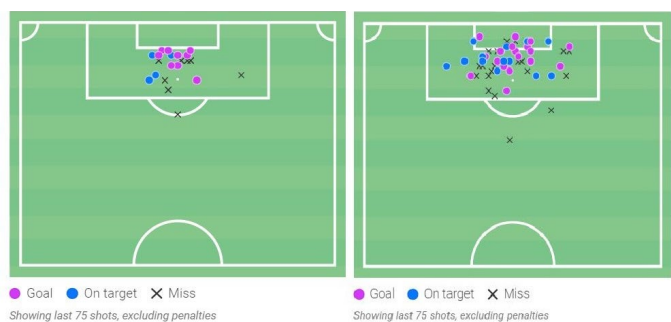
Katoto's average heatmaps for France and PSG.

It is difficult to compete with Katoto for a starting spot, though. As her average shot maps suggest, her movement results in her being into quality positions for scoring, which increases her efficiency immensely. Both her France shot map (left) and her PSG shot map (right) show her impact in the box and the effectiveness of her positioning.

MIDFIELDERS

France are far less secure when it comes to midfield — only five midfielders received a call-up. It is expected that Toletti, Geyoro and Dali will be entrusted with the starting spots.

Palis is another option for the central areas as it is more likely for her to play as a right-sided midfielder or a defensive midfielder, while the other option, Bilbault, is more versatile in terms of her position. Their styles of play have similarities, with them both focusing on their defensive responsibilities, but they do have some differences too.

Palis is highly involved in the ball recovery all over the pitch, although most of her efforts come in the team's own half, where she actively supports the backline.

Bilbault contributes more with passing and despite her defensive midfield position, does move into a more advanced position past the central line.
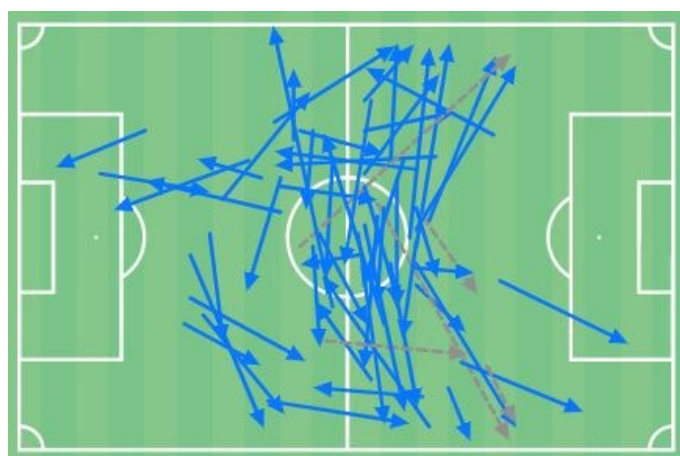
Bilbault's pass map in France's 3:2 win over Slovenia.

That leaves the question: is there a right replacement for Dali, who has more attacking functions? The Everton player has an eye for a good pass and is constantly looking to advance the ball and support the actions in the final third.


Dali picked up the ball and immediately provided a through ball to her teammate on the flank, eliminating the opposing defence.

DEFENDERS

Diacre's options in defence are interchangeable as many of the players can play in different positions. While it is most likely that Bacha, Renard, Mbock Bathy and Périsset will be the first choices, the other players also have chances of being included in the starting XI.

Torrent is a right-back and contributes to ball progression actively, which doesn't take from her defensive performance. Karchaoui, who is more likely to play at the LB, also supports the actions

in possession but is more vulnerable defensively, which is why Bacha is the better option in that position.
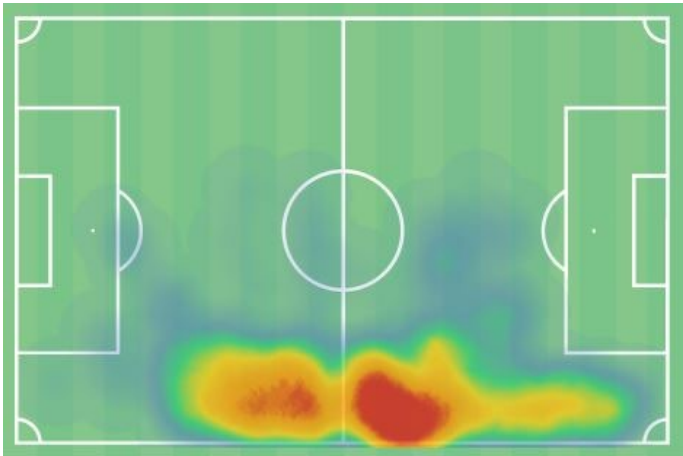

Torrent's heatmap showing her involvement upfront.

Tounkara is a ball-playing defender who is responsible for ball retention and progression. Despite her CB position, she is rarely involved in direct challenges defensively. Her main strength is her pass accuracy; that's why she focuses her efforts when the team have possession. Cissoko, on the other side, is much more defence oriented, and her success in defensive duels, as well as her ability to intercept the ball, make her a more reliable option off the ball.
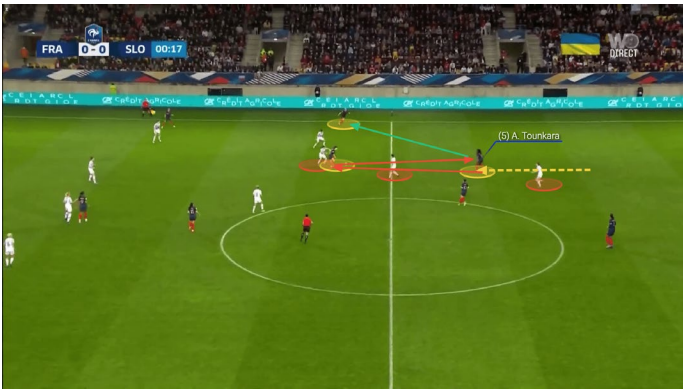
Tounkara escaped her marker and advanced with the ball so she can pass it further. She was then available again for a back pass to retain possession and had the option to immediately spread out to the flank.

BEST PERFORMER
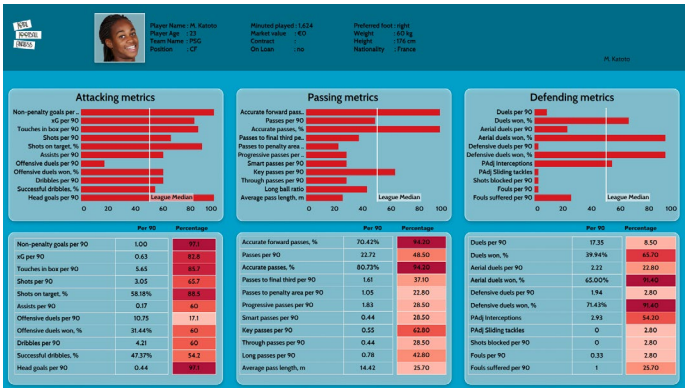
A lot of the responsibility in the EURO 2022 will fall on the forward Katoto, as her impressive displays throughout the season have increased the expectations towards her. After being left out of the squad in 2019 earned the coach a lot of criticism, it is now expected that she will be the key player in the tournament for France.

As her player profile breaking down her domestic performances for the last calendar year underlines, she performs above average in most attacking metrics. Her presence in and around the box provides a direct threat to the goal, and her abilities on the ball often put the opposition in a difficult position.

Katoto's positioning is crucial for her efficiency as her spatial awareness allows her to exploit the tiniest spaces in the box.

While her biggest strength is her attacking contribution, her pass completion rate is higher than the average for her position and shows that her teammates can rely on combining with her in the final third as she can provide quality balls.

As her profile suggests, she is also efficient defensively, in terms of winning her duels, both ground and aerial. She performs better than the average for her position in these indicators and also occasionally contributes to ball recovery.

TOURNAMENT PREDICTION

France have a real chance to win their group and proceed further as they are currently the highest-ranked team in the world when compared to their opponents Italy, Belgium and Iceland.

However, further analysis shows that the road won't be easy as there are multiple title contenders in the fray. Sweden and the Netherlands are the favourites in the competition as their star-studded squads will be motivated to show their full potential and win the European championship.

The hosts England shouldn't be underestimated either, as their confidence will be boosted by their supporters and they will give everything they have to meet the expectations.

France have the chance to reach the quarter-finals of the tournament but they really need to play on their potential and minimise their mistakes in order to be allowed to dream of something bigger.

WENDIE RENARD:

FRANCE

STEWART ROSS // @StewartRoss89

If France are to have a successful Euro 2022 in England this summer, then their inspirational captain, Wendie Renard, will almost certainly be a leading light in the side as we believe she's got a central role to play for France both on and off the pitch.

After their 2019 World Cup campaign on home soil ended in disappointment when France were eliminated by eventual winners, the United States, at the quarter-final stage, Les Bleus will be hoping to make further progress in this summer's competition under the leadership of the hugely experienced Renard.

BACKGROUND

Centre-back Renard (31), who has played her whole club career at Lyon, has had a roller-coaster international experience. She skippered her nation from 2013 to 2017 before being removed from the role after Euro 2017 but has now been re-appointed following a fall-out between previous captain, Renard's Lyon teammate Amandine Henry, and manager Corinne Diacre.

A natural leader, Renard was the first player to reach 100 UEFA women's club competition appearances and picked up an incredible eighth Women's Champions League title in May after guiding Lyon to a 3-1 victory over Barcelona in Turin.

With over 30 domestic titles to her name, the Lyon captain's experience will be vital for Diacre this summer.

It will not only be Renard's experience that will be key for France, though. In this player profile, we will take a closer look at Renard's playing style and the technical and tactical qualities she offers.

DATA ANALYSIS

Firstly, we'll look at Renard's data profile for the 2021/22 domestic season.

Attacking metrics	Per 90	Percentage
Non-penalty goals per 90	0.18	94.7
xG per 90	0.16	93.1
Touches in box per 90	1.59	67.3
Shots per 90	1.24	94.7
Shots on target, %	28.57%	26.3
Assists per 90	0.00	2.6
Offensive duels per 90	1.83	47.3
Offensive duels won, %	41.94%	50
Dribbles per 90	0.53	44.7
Successful dribbles, %	66.67%	73.6
Head goals per 90	0.12	94.7

Passing metrics	Per 90	Percentage
Accurate forward passes, %	83.01%	97.30
Passes per 90	72.26	93.10
Accurate passes, %	89.15%	93.10
Passes to final third per 90	15.74	97.30
Passes to penalty area per 90	0.83	76.30
Progressive passes per 90	16.27	97.30
Smart passes per 90	0.24	89.40
Key passes per 90	0.18	81.50
Through passes per 90	0.65	76.30
Long passes per 90	9.31	39.40
Average pass length, m	23.14	94.70

| Defending metrics	Per 90	Percentage
Duels per 90	12.32	31.50
Duels won, %	67.94%	94.70
Aerial duels per 90	3.71	84.20
Aerial duels won, %	77.78%	94.70
Defensive duels per 90	4.89	5.20
Defensive duels won, %	79.52%	97.30
PAdj Interceptions	5.88	26.30
PAdj Sliding tackles	0.88	84.20
Shots blocked per 90	0.12	7.80
Fouls per 90	0.53	26.30
Fouls suffered per 90	0.35	47.30

What stands out immediately in Renard's profile are her passing metrics, scoring above the 75th percentile rank in all but one (long ball ratio). She scores in the upper 90th percentile rank for passing metrics such as progressive passes per 90 and passes to the final third per 90, while she also ranks very highly for her overall accuracy % of passes. This shows, as we will see later in this analysis, that Renard is a very effective ball-playing centre-back.

Defensively, Renard does not get involved in too many duels, likely due to her side's ball dominance, but when she does engage, she scores very highly for both defensive and aerial duels won %.

Attacking-wise, she is just below the league average for dribbles per 90, so she is not as progressive with the ball in terms of carries as she is in her passing. We can also see she dominates in goal-scoring metrics, including headed goals per 90. This threat in the opposition box is something we will also see later in this analysis.

DEFENSIVE PHASE
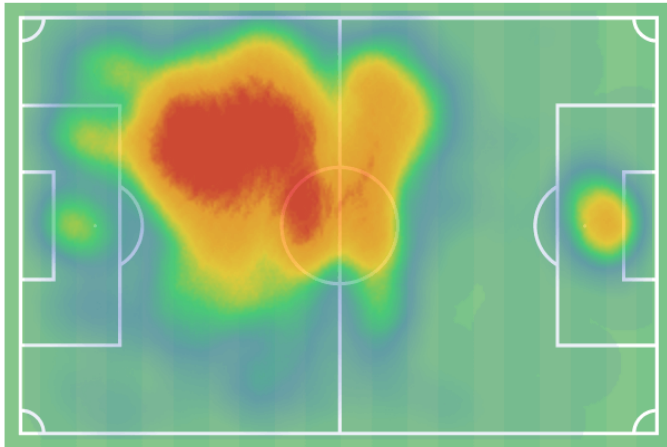
As we can see in her 2021/22 heatmap, Renard is most often deployed at left centre-back in a back four in France's 4-3-3 or 4-1-4-1 while she is also used in a similar role, in similar formations, for Lyon. She has also played the middle of three in a 3-5-2 for her club on occasion. Defensively, Renard is a good organiser, communicating threats to her teammates.

She is an aggressive, front-foot defender, anticipating the opponent's intentions well and swiftly moving in to intercept before passes reach their intended targets. If opponents do get the first touch, Renard is very effective in duels, as seen in her data profile. She shows controlled aggression, looking to get a foot or leg in at the earliest opportunity to steal possession.
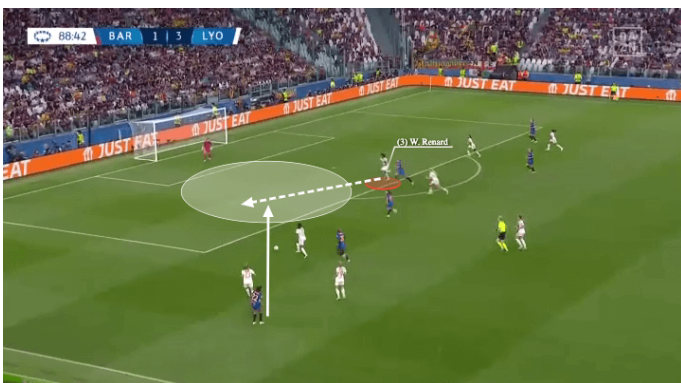
As we can see in this example from the Women's Champions League final, despite being deep into stoppage time and the game effectively over, Renard still defends proactively, reading the forward pass and moving into midfield to engage. She shapes her body well to get her left foot to the ball around the side of the intended recipient with her touch picked up by her teammate in midfield.
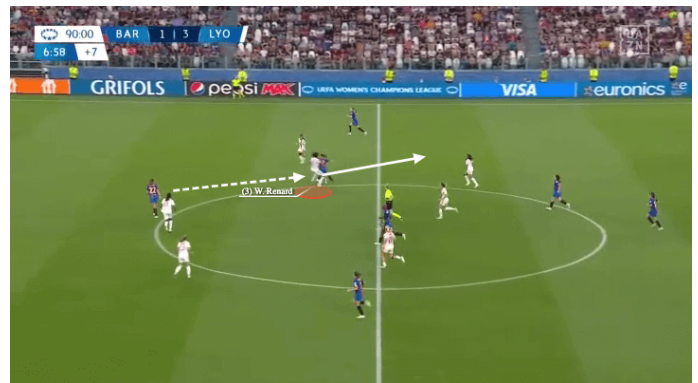
Renard has an excellent understanding of depth and distances, covering spaces effectively, as seen in another example from the final against Barcelona. Here, the Barcelona player has played a through ball in behind on the left side. Renard has spotted the danger early and quickly moves across, matching the run of the intended recipient and blocking any direct route to the goal.

TRANSITION

France will likely play a high line as they will look to dominate the ball in most games of the tournament — something Renard is more than used to with her all-conquering Lyon team. If they do use a high line and look to win the ball back high up the pitch in transitions, then this will be something Renard will be more than comfortable with.
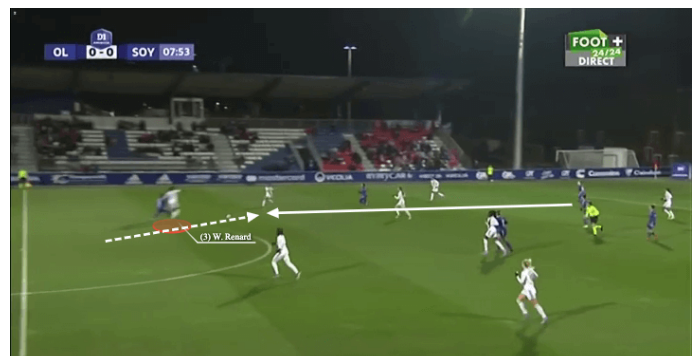
Aggressive in transition phases, Renard uses her speed and physicality to quickly win the ball

back. Here we see an example in Lyon's home game against Soyaux in the Division 1 Féminine. The ball is turned over on the edge of the Soyaux box and they play a direct forward pass. Renard reads the pass and aggressively steps up, using her pace and power to win the ball back in front of the attacker. She then releases a pass out wide into the final third, which puts Lyon back on the attack immediately.

If the opposition attempt to get in behind during a transition, Renard has the speed and power to cover spaces, matching most attackers to either get a foot or a leg in or shaping her imposing frame to usher them out into wide areas near the touchline, such as in the following example in a game against rivals PSG.

ATTACKING PHASE

Renard will likely have a key role in France's build-up, starting and even leading attacks from the back.

As we see in her data profile, Renard is very much a ball-playing centre-back, underlined by her high percentile ranks for key possession metrics such as progressive passes and passes to the final third. Calm and composed in possession, Renard protects the ball well when under pressure.
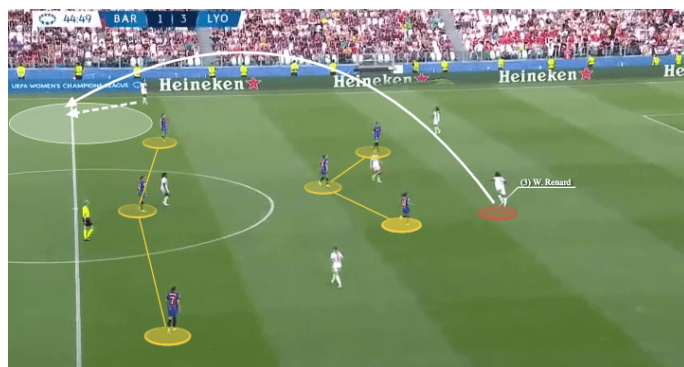
Renard can produce accurate passes, particularly diagonals, over distance into wide, advanced areas that release her teammates into space, as we can see in the above example. Here she has shifted the ball onto her stronger right and plays a long pass out into the wide right area, taking out two lines of defence and giving the right-back possession in a position where she can attack the Barcelona backline.

She is also capable of stepping up into midfield to draw out opponents who may sit deeper. Once she has released the ball she will quickly drop into a position to offer another passing lane if they need to rebuild.

Renard is a big threat from attacking set-pieces with her height and strength a big advantage in the opposition box. Often taking up a position towards the back post to head back across goal, as seen in the next example of her crucial goal against PSG in the Champions League.

Even if the delivery is not of the best quality, Renard can still use her excellent heading technique to make the most of them. As seen in the next example. Here, the ball is sent towards the front post while swinging away from her. However, Renard adjusts her body to glance the ball over the goalkeeper.

Renard is such a presence in the box that even if she is not found with the delivery, she draws the attention of opposition defenders, creating space for others to exploit.

PHYSICAL PROFILE

Renard is a towering presence on the pitch at 6'2" and 70kg. She has a relatively slender frame but is physically strong with explosive power that helps her challenge aggressively in duels.

Given her size, she is pacey both on and off the ball and has good acceleration as well as mobility, the latter of which allows her to change direction quickly.

She also has excellent endurance, as we saw in one of the first examples where she was still powerfully winning duels late on in a match.

CONCLUSION

Captaining her country to a European championship title would be a crowning achievement for a player who has been a dominant presence in the women's game in every sense.

With well-documented issues ahead of the tournament, many will be expecting France to stumble this summer.

However, with Renard leading the way there is still a good chance of Les Blues making a big impact in England this July.
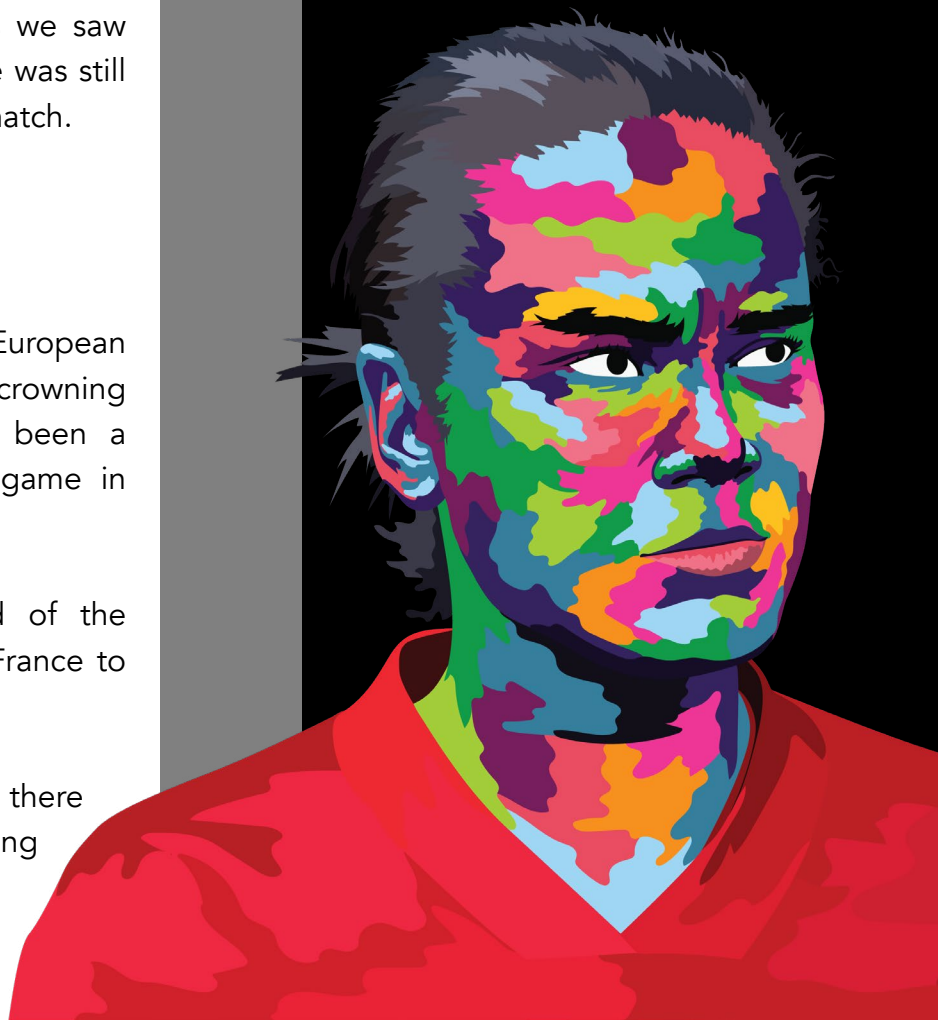
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