



2024
OLYMPICS

TOTAL FOOTBALL ANALYSIS

#111 // JULY 2024 // WOMEN'S OLYMPICS SOCCER

AN IN-DEPTH TACTICAL ANALYSIS OF ALL PARTICIPATING TEAMS. FIND OUT WHICH PLAYERS WILL BE KEY TO THEIR TEAM'S SUCCESS, AS WELL AS THE OFFENSIVE AND DEFENSIVE SETUP OF EACH TEAM. PLUS WE REVEAL SIX BREAK-THROUGH PLAYERS TO KEEP YOUR EYE ON.

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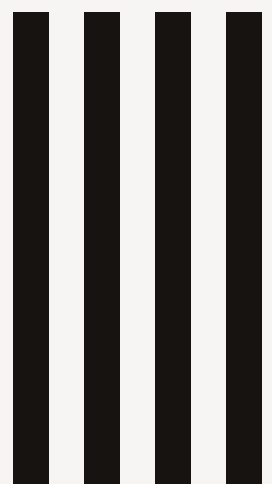
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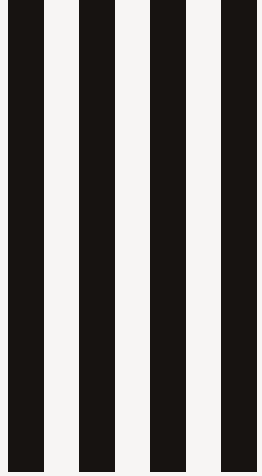
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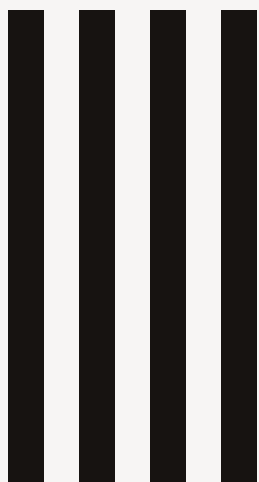
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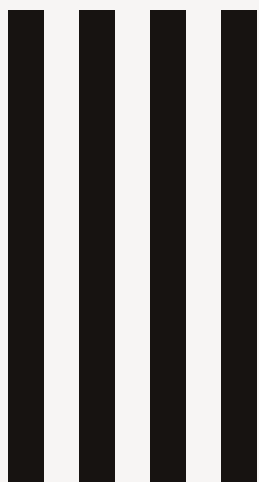


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2024 OLYMPICS

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**FRANCE
COLOMBIA
CANADA
NEW ZEALAND**



2024 OLYMPICS GROUP A

WENDIE RENARD



FRANCE

FRANCE

FINTAN O'REILLY // @FINTANFOOTBALL

France have competed in the Women's Olympic Football Tournament twice before, finishing in fourth place in 2012 before getting eliminated in the quarter-finals in the 2016 edition.

This year, with Les Bleues set to compete in front of their home fans, motivation will be at an all-time high among a squad of players with great ability to deliver Olympic success.

This tactical analysis piece will provide analysis in the form of a team-focused scout report detailing what tactics you can expect from international tournament specialist Hervé Renard's side this summer.

PREDICTED STARTING XI



We've got Renard lining his side up in a 4-3-3 shape with one holding midfielder behind two more advanced central midfielders, as depicted in figure 1, though he's also used the 4-2-3-1 at times with this France side.

Most frequently, we've found France defending in a 4-1-4-1 and attacking in something resembling a 4-3-3, the specifics of which we'll go into greater detail on in later stages of this scout report.

Pauline Peyraud-Magnin is likely to start between the sticks, with the Juventus stopper having essentially made the position hers.

She'll be protected by a back-four consisting of right-back Éliisa De Almeida, right centre-back Maëlle Lakrar, left centre-back Wendie Renard and left-back Sakina Karchaoui.

Sandie Toletti is likely to start at the base of France's midfield three behind our duo of Grace Geyoro at right central midfield and Selma Bacha — a versatile player capable of operating in central midfield, at left-back or at left-wing — occupying left central midfield as she often has for Renard.

In attack, we've gone for Delphine Cascarino on the left, the 2023/24 UEFA Women's Champions League top scorer Kadidiatou Diani of Lyon on the right and the same prestigious competition's second-highest goalscorer, Marie-Antoinette Katoto of PSG through the middle.



On the substitutes bench, with this piece being written before Renard's official 18-player squad has been announced, we've included Constance Picaud as the backup goalkeeper, Estelle

Cascarino and Ève Périsset as defenders, Amandine Henry and Kenza Dali as midfielders along with Eugénie Le Sommer and Sandy Baltimore as forwards.

That leaves us with a fairly experienced squad for the tournament featuring just one player aged 23 and under — Selma Bacha — with five over 30, including goalkeeper Peyraud-Magnin and captain Wendie Renard.

The majority of the team, including nine of the starting XI, are in their prime years, giving them as good a chance of achieving success on the international stage now as they'll likely ever have. France's squad is a strong one that should be underestimated by any opponent at their peril.

ATTACKING PHASE

Regardless of whether they line up in a 4-1-4-1 or 4-2-3-1 out-of-possession on paper, France tend to attack with a lone holding midfielder. Meanwhile, they will almost certainly play with a back-four with the centre-backs splitting a bit wide without the ball, allowing that holding midfielder to drop slightly and creating a central passing option for the goalkeeper between the left and right centre-back options.



Figure 3 provides an example of France lining up in a 4-2-3-1 versus England. As the goalkeeper gets on the ball here, watch how the double-pivot drifts apart, with one dropping to become the holding midfielder while the other advances to join the '10' just off the striker when we progress into figure 4.



This long ball is played towards the centre-forward, who is then able to link up with the midfielder advancing from deep while the actual '10' begins making a run in behind to attack the space vacated by the centre-forward. The striker has successfully forged a gap in the English backline by dragging the right centre-back into midfield via her off-the-ball movement.

This creates an excellent opportunity for the central midfielder to play the advancing '10' through behind the English backline — a great example of how France can generate opportunities for penetration in possession.

Renard is a coach whose teams are typically very possession-based—that's no different with this France side. Expect to see them approach games with the aim of controlling the ball for the majority of the contest.

At the same time, the likes of Wendie Renard and Éliça De Almeida are solid ball-playing defenders who, along with Peyraud-Magnin, will look to exploit the hold-up abilities of Katoto and get the ball forward early, at times, as we saw in figure 4, so opponents will also need to be prepared for this type of ball, along with the off-the-ball movement this type of pass will trigger from those around Katoto which could create opportunities for the intricate passing combinations Hervé Renard loves to see his team pull off when seeking opportunities for chance creation.

France generally like to play out through their centre-backs from the build-up, but captain Renard's ball-playing ability exceeds that of Lakrar. The latter could be targeted with an intelligent pressing scheme, especially due to her tendency to carry the ball into wider areas on receiving. This leaves her open to being pressed hard from out-to-in, forcing her into a rushed action.

The wingers often start wide in earlier phases of the attack but will come narrower as the attack progresses, especially the left-winger with Sakina Karchaoui, who is likely to be bombing up and down the flank from left-back.

DEFENSIVE PHASE

This France team is comfortable defending high as a unit. They tend to press the opposition right from the beginning of their build-up, with the centre-forward likely to try and cut the pitch in half by positioning herself between the centre-back on the ball and the opposite centre-back, as we see in figure 5.



The 4-1-4-1 defensive shape we referenced earlier is also on show in figure 5, though we can see the right central midfielder getting dragged a bit high by the opposition's holding midfielder.

In general, France defend in a position-oriented 4-1-4-1, but players will pick up opponents who enter their zone, with the midfielders, in particular, marking tight.



We often find one of France's central midfielders — or the '10' if they are playing with a 4-2-3-1 — joining the centre-forward in the first line of pressure when Les Bleues decide to really press the opposition's backline, as shown in figure 6.

In addition to these tactics, which attempt to rule out the opposition's numerical advantage versus France's lone striker in the build-up, their other central midfielder will pick up the deepest midfielder, as we can also see above.

When France press high, we always find their wingers positioned quite narrow and this holds even more true when the central midfielders push closer to the centre-forward. The purpose of this is to ensure the centre of the pitch remains horizontally compact and difficult for the opponents to find space to play through the French.

However, a downside to these aggressive tactics is that France's midfielders can get pulled too high, leading to an excess of space opening up between their midfield and defensive lines.

This can allow opponents with intelligent passers and smart off-the-ball movement to create opportunities for ball progression into dangerous areas—something France's opponents should be aware of and aim to exploit in this summer's tournament.



Figure 7 shows another instance of France's centre-forward cutting the pitch in half and forcing the opponent to play to one side of the pitch. This leads to the full-back on that wing pushing up while the midfield shifts over to congest the space around the wide ball carrier and deny further progression.

Les Bleues are very good at pressing in this manner, denying central progression for the most part and using the sideline as an additional defensive weapon. However, this type of pressing comes with its drawbacks, one of which is evident in the passage of play above.

The opposition are able to switch the ball back over to the opposite side of the pitch via the goalkeeper, where France have now got no players readily available to press. Opponents who are able to effectively switch the ball from one side of the pitch to the other at pace have the capacity to hurt France as a result of their pressing tactics to congest space out on the wing, which could lead to goalscoring opportunities.

TRANSITIONS

Defensive transitions are another area in which Hervé Renard's side could encounter issues and where Peyraud-Magnin could be called into action.

As mentioned earlier, France tend to build their attacks with one deep-lying midfielder in front of two centre-backs spread fairly wide. Should they lose possession in the middle of the park, where the opposition will be likely to press with some level of intensity, it could leave that holding midfielder vulnerable to an overload, as England proved in this example shown in figures 8 and 9.



After winning the ball from France's right central midfielder, they create an opportunity to counter and perform a nice one-two combination around the lone holding midfielder, leading them in behind the French backline and through on goal.

This directly resulted from a cheap loss of possession in the middle third. France's opponents should aim to create similar opportunities in transition during the Olympics if they want to maximise their chances of troubling Les Bleues' net.

When attacking further upfield, it's common to see France keep three defenders in the backline — probably with right-back De Almeida shifting over alongside the central defensive duo. At the same time, Karchaoui moves forward on the left, and the left-winger moves inside.

Diani on the right will also come inside but will likely hold the width on that side of the pitch for slightly longer — expect her to make intelligent runs inside both on and off the ball, however, with her goalscoring prowess likely to prove vital to Hervé Renard’s offensive strategy.

In offensive transitions, France’s ball carriers will be key, including the wingers and two more advanced central midfielders.

G. GEYORO BALL PROGRESSION

All games from Coupe de France Féminine 2023/2024, Féminine Division 1 2023/2024, UEFA Women's Champions League 2023/2024.



Right central midfielder Grace Geyoro is never shy to demand the ball and try to take opponents on with it at her feet — see her ball progression map from the 2023/24 campaign above. Expect her to prove vital to France’s attack and transitions to attack this summer.

G. GEYORO SHOT ASSISTS

All games from Féminine Division 1 2023/2024, Coupe de France Féminine 2023/2024, UEFA Women's Champions League 2023/2024.



A capable playmaker from the middle of the park, Geyoro generated 5.38 expected assists

and provided six actual assists for PSG in all competitions this past campaign.

D. CASCARINO BALL PROGRESSION

All games from Féminine Division 1 2023/2024, Coupe de France Féminine 2023/2024, UEFA Women's Champions League 2023/2024.



Similarly, Delphine Cascarino is likely to prove crucial to France’s chance creation. Her side will look to her to use her ball-carrying ability in the final third and to help them quickly put the opponent on the back foot in transition to attack.

Capable of hurting the opponent on either wing; see her ball progression map from the 2023/24 campaign in figure 12.

DEFENDERS

In addition to our four starters — De Almeida (RB), Lakrar (RCB), Renard (LCB) and Karchaoui (LB), we’ve predicted Hervé Renard will bring Estelle Cascarino and Ève Périsset to this summer’s Olympics, completing the French defensive options.

We feel these two provide France with good cover across the backline; Périsset provides a different type of right-back option to De Almeida, far more of a creator similar to Karchaoui on the left, and Cascarino provides adequate cover at centre-back.

France also have Selma Bacha, who is very comfortable at left-back, in our predicted squad, so the defence should be well-equipped.

MIDFIELDERS

Backing up Toletti, Geyoro and Bacha, we've put veteran midfielder Amandine Henry and Kenza Dali in our predicted squad.

Henry is an excellent alternative in the deep-lying midfield position; she'll likely get minutes over Toletti, either as a direct replacement for her or as a replacement for Bacha, with Toletti advancing to Bacha's left central midfield position in our predicted starting XI.

Meanwhile, Dali is capable of operating in the left or right central midfield positions and potentially giving her side additional cover on the wings, making her another potentially valuable, versatile player.

Léa Le Garrec just about missed out on our predicted squad — she's another fantastic player who has a great chance of being included as a central midfield option.

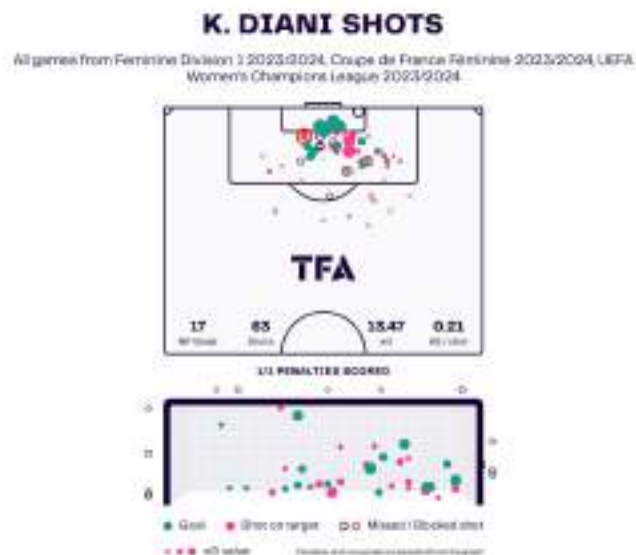
FORWARDS

We've put Eugénie Le Sommer into our predicted squad, though her inclusion is heavily dependent on her current fitness levels. Even if not 100% fit, we feel she may be a valuable squad member for Hervé Renard, given her immense experience and her goalscoring prowess. This could prove crucial for Les Bleues despite maybe not being able to offer as much of herself to the team as she'd like.

Along with Le Sommer, we've included 24-year-old Sandy Baltimore as a backup option to the starting trio of Diani, Katoto and Cascarino, with her and Le Sommer capable of providing ample competition for those starters.

KEY PLAYER

We've chosen Lyon's Kadidiatou Diani as France's key player, though plenty, including Katoto, Geyoro, and Renard, are likely to prove critical to Les Bleues at times during the tournament.



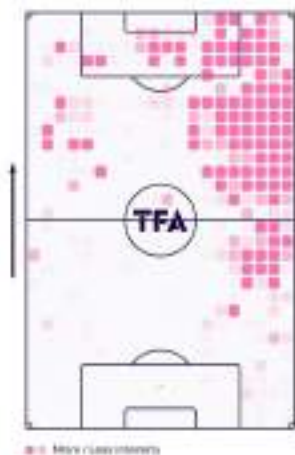
Diani is entering the Olympics from a stellar 2023/24 campaign in which she bagged 18 goals (17 non-penalty goals) in all competitions from 13.47 expected goals (xG).

The Lyon forward averaged 0.21 xG per shot—a very decent average that reflects her top-class positioning, shot selection, and movement, which allowed her to successfully occupy high-quality goalscoring areas and get onto the ball there with regularity.

As per her 2023/24 shot map in figure 13, the forward mainly shoots towards the 'near' post from her side of the pitch, with Diani typically operating on the right side of attack, as indicated by our expected lineup back in figure 1 and her heatmap from the 2023/24 campaign in figure 14 below.

K. DIANI HEATMAP

All games from Coupe de France Féminine 2023/2024, Féminine Division 1 2023/2024, UEFA Women's Champions League 2023/2024



This heatmap is indicative of her role out on the wide right, where we'll expect to see her spend a decent amount of time for France in the Olympics. However, she's going to pop up in excellent goalscoring positions inside the box and showcase her positional and tactical intelligence via out-to-in runs, which will allow her to attack the box and generate the high-percentage chances we discussed above.

K. DIANI SHOT ASSISTS

All games from Coupe de France Féminine 2023/2024, Féminine Division 1 2023/2024, UEFA Women's Champions League 2023/2024



Not just a goalscorer, Diani will also bring creativity to the French forward line. This past season with Lyon, she generated 10.47 xA and contributed 15 assists— see the locations of her shot assists for 2023/24 in figure 15.

TOURNAMENT PREDICTION

Simply based on quality, France should be aiming for no less than equalling their 2012 showing in the Olympics, finishing within the top-four.

With a home crowd to spur them on, as well as a core of in-form players entering the tournament off the back of a stellar 2023/24 with their respective clubs, a team primarily in its prime and a tournament specialist at the helm in Hervé Renard — all signs are pointing in the right direction for France who'll probably be aiming to at least go all the way to the final but tough competition awaits in the form of the USA and Spain who'll be well equipped to spoil the party and take gold for themselves.

2024 OLYMPICS GROUP A

DANIELA MONTOYA



COLOMBIA

COLOMBIA

SAM HUTCHINSON // @SAM51867823

Colombia will be on many people's radars after their recent tournament performances. They come into this Olympics looking to impress further after receiving many plaudits for competing with the giants of the sport and exceeding the expectations of many over the last three years.

Colombia have reached the latter stages of the previous three major tournaments that they have participated in. In 2022, they hosted Copa América and came agonisingly close to winning the competition, losing in the final to Brazil.

Then, in the 2023 World Cup, they gained attention on a global scale. Impressive displays, including a victory against former World Champions Germany, was part of their journey that led to them reaching the quarter-finals, where they narrowly lost to England. Most recently, in the 2024 Gold Cup, Colombia reached the quarter-final stage again, where they lost to hosts and eventual champions USA.

Colombia have benefited from a great deal of consistency from their technical staff. Former manager Nelson Abadía spent eight years working in a variety of roles across both the youth and senior sides. They are now led by his former assistant, 38-year-old Ángelo Marsiglia, who is taking charge of his second major tournament as head coach. This steadiness of the side, coming under the same guidance for years, has allowed the players to be well-prepared to head into major tournaments. Maybe now more than ever, this will be vital to the team's success.

Drawn in a group with hosts France, current Olympic gold medallists Canada, and regulars in the competition, New Zealand poses a real challenge in Paris. This tactical analysis will look to pinpoint what elements of Colombia's game will allow them to be a success in this year's tournament and what will hinder them from continuing their excellent performances at major competitions.

PREDICTED STARTING XI



With the strength of Colombia's competition, I believe they will line up in a traditional 4-3-3 formation. Over the past twelve months, this has been one of Marisglia's most used formations, particularly against stronger nations. He has, however, opted to use a 4-2-3-1 and a 4-4-2 on occasions.

The traditional 4-3-3 formation usually means that one of Colombia's many exciting attacking options misses out on a starting spot. However, it does provide a great deal of balance to the team, ensuring that adequate defensive cover is provided without restriction on some of Colombia's most offensive players.

21-year-old Natalia Giraldo will start as Goalkeeper. Having gained her first taste of being a starting goalkeeper at a major tournament in the Concacaf Gold Cup, she will

come into this tournament more prepared. She will, however, have competition from veteran Sandra Sepulveda, whose experience will be a great aid to the squad both off the pitch and on it if called upon.

The defence will likely consist of Manuela Vanegas at right-back, a centre-back partnership of Daniela Arias and Jorelyn Carabalí, and Carolina Arias starting at left-back. The back four are all capable on the ball, and both full-backs have a real desire to push forward and support the attack.

In midfield, Lorena Bedoya will start as the deepest midfielder. The Real Brasilia midfielder will act as a destroyer and provide protection to the defence. Alongside her will be captain Daniela Montoya and Ilana Izquierdo. Both 8s are assets to their team through their competency in possession and their work rate off the ball.

The front three has the most chance of varying throughout the tournament. Real Madrid's Linda Caciado is certain to start on the left wing and will cause trouble to every defence. Through the middle, Colombia have a variety of options. All-time record goal scorer Catalina Usme will lead the line, providing not only a threat in front of goal but also an ability to link play. Chelsea forward Mayra Ramírez and Manuela Paví of Athletic Minero will be different number 9 options to come off the bench. Marcela Restrepo will start on the right wing, having become a consistent feature of Colombia's first 11 over the past 12 months.



Colombia's squad has much of the key make ups to have tournament success. They have experience in vital positions in the team, with Montoya, Daniela Arias and Usme all having well over 70 caps. This is mixed with players who are at the peak of their powers who are currently in their prime years, with the likes of Carabalí, Bedoya and Restrepo all falling between the ages of 25 and 28. Colombia also possesses young, up-and-coming talents, such as Caciado and Izquierdo, who will be amongst the best young players at the Olympics.

ATTACKING PHASE

When Colombia look to build up from the back, they have the capability to mix it up. They have the ability to progress the ball through the thirds. However, they aren't afraid to go and try and find Colombia's furthest forward players, with Usme and Ramírez both possessing the ability to hold up the ball.

The greatest hindrance to Colombia's build-up is the technical ability of individual players, more so than the tactical set-up. Essential positions such as the goalkeeper and number 6 are filled by players who don't have the technical qualities to progress play, particularly under pressure.

Bedoya is only successful in 44% of her offensive duels, meaning she can succumb to

pressure from pressing opposition. Goalkeeper Giraldo also has had mixed success when playing forward, completing only 50% of her long passes and 57.7% of her forward passes. The unreliability of these key positions in the build-up can cause real problems for the team and put them under serious pressure.



In this example, Bedoya receives the ball from her defence. She fails to scan critically as the ball travels towards her. She then panics under pressure and plays an under-hit pass, which allows the opposition to latch onto the ball and eventually win a penalty during the counterattack.

Despite Colombia having players that can be targeted due to their technical deficiency, they also have numerous players who can be utilised effectively as they build up play. In the gold cup, both Montoya and Izquierdo had a forward passing accuracy of above 80%. This is particularly on show when Colombia play with a 4-2-3-1 and line up with both players as 6s. However, both players playing as 8s helps Colombia as they often look to penetrate into the final third. Both midfielders are able to make runs from deep to try and get on the ball deep into the opponent's half.



Here, we see Montoya looking to break into the final third with a run from deep. This causes problems, and despite the opposition winning the first ball in this situation, Montoya quickly gets onto the second ball and works a shot for herself.

Dynamic movement is a key element of Colombia's attack. Front players such as Caceido, Usme, and Paví love to drift into different positions and can very easily interchange with one another. Often, the wide forwards will come inside and look to be direct, attacking the goal. The inverted nature of the wide forwards gives space for full-backs to provide attacking support.



This plays out in the example above. Usme has pulled out wide and taken up the role of the right winger. After she drives inward, she plays a ball into the final third for her overlapping teammate, Carolina Arias. Colombia flood the box, and Arias finds Izquierdo with a low cross.

DEFENSIVE PHASE

Colombia are a well-organized team, and you can see clearly from their structure when defending Marsiglia's demands on his players. Off the ball, Colombia work immensely hard to maintain compactness when pressing. In the Gold Cup, they had the fourth-highest PPDA of 6.07. Colombia's pressing strategy is the same regardless of what formation they play. The primary objective is to force the ball out wide and get bodies around the ball.

TRANSITIONS

Colombia's defensive work rate also can be spotted during the defensive transition. They have a great understanding of how to keep their structure and defend effectively against overloads. Colombia also have an extremely combative nature and are more than willing to commit professional fouls to stop counterattacks. They had the most yellow cards in both the previous Gold Cup and World Cup. However, they don't just drop back and invite pressure. Colombia often deploy a counter press after losing possession high up the pitch.



After losing the ball, Colombia press intensely to prevent the first pass forward after the transition. Multiple bodies get around the ball, which results in Colombia winning the ball back in the attacking third of the pitch.

When transitioning from defence to attack, Colombia can keep the ball well, even when coming under a counter press themselves. When they break forward on the counter often, they are relying on the pace and trickery of their forward players to create something. In the 2023 World Cup, Colombia had the third-highest amount of 1v1 dribbles completed. Yet decision-making can often be a killer to Colombia's counterattacks. Their fast forwards can often over-dribble, allowing the defending team to recover. The execution and timing of their passes can also be a factor in fulfilling their potential on the counter.



This is a prime example of Colombia's effective pressing. Caicedo, who started the press, forced the opposition to play one way and then cut off a pass back inside. Usme made up a lot of ground to put the opposition's centre back under immense pressure. Daniela Arias pressed up extremely high to mark the only option the player on the ball had. This forced a long clearance, which Colombia easily won.

Colombia are even more impressive when it comes to defending in their own half. They have an excellent understanding of how to provide cover for one and another to help them defend against dangerous attacks. In the 2023 World Cup, Colombia made the second-most number of tackles in the defensive third.



This example shows that Vanegas has been beaten in a 1v1 duel against the opposition's right winger. After having previously left her position to press a forward, Daniela Arias provides cover and stops the attack. Bedoya also shows her capacity to fulfil her role as a 6 by covering for Arias to ensure the defensive line isn't outnumbered and can deal with any potential danger.



However, despite being weaker on the ball, Bedoya will be vital against France and Canada. In tightly contested games, her ability to break up play will be key. Bedoya won the fourth most tackles in the World Cup and will provide much-needed protection to the defence.

In this scenario, Colombia have won the ball back, and Caicedo is in a promising position, threatening in behind. Unfortunately, Bedoya's ball is poor and goes straight to the opposition.

DEFENDERS

As highlighted, the defensive unit works effectively together when put under pressure. Vanegas, Carabalí, Daniela, and Carolina Arias will significantly influence Colombia's success. Defensively, Brighton defender Jorelyn Carabalí will be critical. She has a percentile rank of 99 for tackles per 90 compared to centre-backs in the WSL.

Offensively, Colombia's defence is calm on the ball, yet they must ensure that no unforced errors occur that lead to easy goals. The full-backs will also be vital in attacks in the final third, with Manuela Vanegas having a percentile rank of 84 for shot-creating actions by full-backs in Liga F this season for Real Sociedad.

MIDFIELDERS

It will be interesting to see how Colombia's midfield adapts throughout the tournament. Against New Zealand, a nation Colombia will be favourites to beat, I believe Paví or Usme will be used as a 10 with Izquierdo and Montoya playing in a double pivot. This will give Colombia greater attacking options on the pitch to win the game against weaker opposition.

FORWARDS

Offensively, there's much to be excited about and plenty of options for Marsiglia to pick from. Caicedo and Usme will deservedly have a lot of attention placed on them. However, Ramírez could be one to watch when she is used. She has incredible physical attributes that she uses to cause havoc to defences. She has a percentile rank of 98 in successful take-ons, touches in attacking box and progressive passes received. Despite the usual fluidity that Colombia's front three normally have, Ramírez could provide a vocal point at difficult points in the tournament when a target forward is needed.

Defensively, due to Colombia's pressing, a variety of options will need to be used. In a 4-3-3, an aggressive approach will be taken regardless of the opponent. Yet when playing in a 4-4-2 or 4-2-3-1, Colombia have also been effective before defending with a front two of Usme and Ramírez, particularly against teams who aim to find their 6 in the build-up, screening balls through the middle of the pitch.

KEY PLAYER

Caicedo announced herself internationally at the last World Cup, with the 19-year-old scoring some incredible goals. Now, after her first full season in Spain, the Real Madrid star is looking to step up and become a leader for her country.

With Caicedo taking up a position on the left wing, she often drifts to get on the ball and then uses her speed and close control to glide past



Here, Caicedo has moved inside and received the ball between the opposition's midfield and defensive lines. She takes the ball on her back foot and begins to drive towards goal. She then passes the ball off to an advancing teammate.

Many of Caicedo's stats would point to these obvious strengths. She has a percentile rank of 97 for progressive carries in Liga F this season when compared to other attackers. She also ranks 93 for successful take-ons and 86 for shot-creating actions. Her end product has been decent as well, with a combined goal and assist tally of 9.

Caicedo does have an incredible work rate as well. She proves that by having a percentile rank of 84 for tackles made in the defensive third. This work rate is also shown in the way she presses opponents intensely in the final third.

Caicedo has a lot of responsibility placed on her young shoulders. Despite this, I predict she will be one of the standout performers of the tournament and put in more memorable performances that will only raise her profile.

TOURNAMENT PREDICTION

I believe Colombia can have another positive tournament. However, we don't feel they have the necessary tools to win the competition. In what is a tricky group, four points should be the minimum expectation that Marsiglia will have of his team.

A win against New Zealand and at least one point from their games against Canada and France should be enough to see them through to the quarter-finals. Finishing runner-up should give them a quarter-final draw against Group B's runner-up.

This is where we see Colombia finishing the tournament, as they may lack the firepower to help them overcome the bigger nations. Yet it won't be a surprise if, against the odds, they progress to the semi-final.

2024 OLYMPICS GROUP A

JESSIE FLEMING



CANADA

CANADA

KARIM EL-SHESHEINY // @ELSHESHEINY

In the upcoming edition of Women's Olympic Football, Canada will participate in Group A with France, Colombia and New Zealand. After suffering a quarter-final defeat in their maiden tournament appearance in 2008, Canada won back-to-back bronze medals at London 2012 and Rio 2016. Then came their crowning glory at Tokyo 2020. They beat Brazil in the last eight and their neighbours, the United States, in the semis to set up a gold medal showdown with Sweden. A tense final finished 1-1 after extra time, meaning penalties were required to separate the teams. Canada prevailed in the shootout, with Julia Grosso's spot-kick clinching a historic victory.

Canada will seek to emulate the United States and become the second nation to triumph at back-to-back Women's Olympic football tournaments. In the latest Women's World Ranking, they are in eighth place, meaning that they should do their best to keep their glory or at least get a silver or bronze medal. Still, fans are worried because they exited at the group stage in the previous World Cup.

"We're naturally humble as a team and, given the World Cup we had, we're not going into these Olympics thinking that we have a big target on our back as the reigning champions. It's all about focusing on being the best version of ourselves that we can be. The rest will take care of itself. Having said all that, we want to be on that podium again, and we'll be doing everything in our power to get there" —coach Beverly Priestman said.

In the form of a tactical analysis, this scout report will provide a detailed analysis of Canada's tactics under Beverly Priestman.

PREDICTED STARTING XI

Canada usually rely on the 3-4-3 formation as a foundation, with three centre-backs, two wing-backs, two midfielders, three forwards, two inside wingers and the centre-forward, as shown in the graph below.

In goalkeeping, the choice ranges between Kailen Sheridan and Sabrina D'Angelo. However, Kailen Sheridan will probably be Canada's number one between the sticks. Beverly Priestman relies on three centre-backs, who will probably be Jade Rose, Vanessa Gilles, and Kadeisha Buchanan, from right to left.

Regarding the two flying wing-backs, the coach switched between wingers and full-backs to achieve balance, defend or attack regarding the opponent and the match conditions. Still, we think that Ashley Lawrence and Jayde Riviere will probably be the first choices.

The first choices as the two central midfielders will remain Jessie Fleming and Julia Grosso, but Simi Awujo may fight Grosso for the second position in midfield next to Fleming.

They have many diverse choices in the three forward positions as most of them play in many positions as a striker or a winger, which is good for the team, increasing the choices and fluidity in the game. Still, we think that Aston Villa's player, Adriana Leon, will be the first choice as the centre-forward despite being a winger. As the right and left inside wingers, we think Janine Beckie and Cloé Lacasse will be the first choices, considering that Jordyn Huitema, Evelyne Viens and Deanne Rose may fight for a place in the starting XI.

ATTACKING PHASE

They prefer the 3-4-3 formation with the ball, especially in the progression and final third phases, in which they spend most of their time. As shown in the first photo below, they prefer to have three defenders, two midfielders, and five attackers in the five channels.

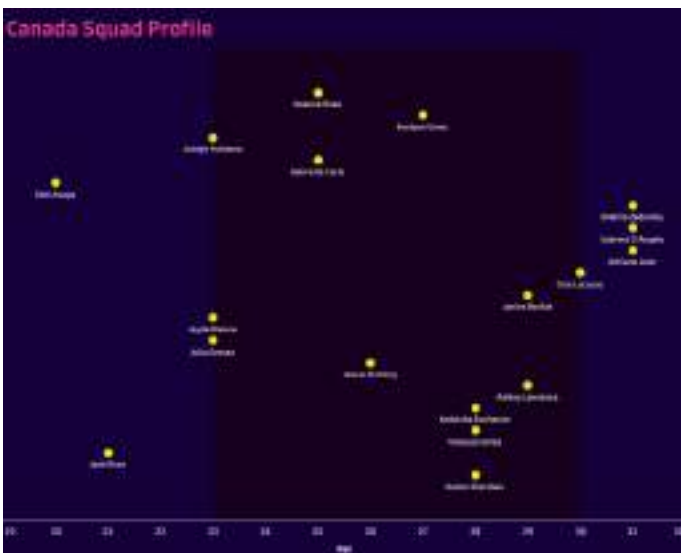
The two wing-backs stretch the width in the two outer flanks while the centre-forward fills the centre, and the two inside wingers are in the two half-spaces.

However, they prefer not to put their two midfielders in the same horizontal line, asking one of them to stand a little forward in the half-space to be a passing option and to drag the opponent winger, leaving his full-back in a 1-v-2 situation against Canada's wing-back and inside winger, as shown in the second photo.

However, this midfielder decides to turn and passes the ball to the right side to the inside winger, who drags the full-back to free the right wing-back.



Beverly Priestman's squad age profile is shown below.



The coach's choices are a mix of experience and youth. The expertise represented by Adriana Leon to withstand the pressure and help the rest of the players and the youth like Jayde Riviere make the team more active and quick transitions.



The plan works excellently, as shown in the two photos below.



Even if the opponent's winger decides to implement his duty and tracks back, as in the two photos below, Canada have another solution: They ask the left centre-back to dribble forward until forcing one of the opponent's two midfielders to face him and then pass the ball to one of his two midfielders who pushes high.



Most of the time, this movement put the opponent's winger against a tough and essential duty, which is tracking Canada's wing-back, which is a tough task for a forward player. What increases the importance of this tracking back is the position of the inside winger who fixes the opponent's full-back. Often, wingers can't do that, as shown in the two photos below.



In the build-up phase, they sometimes use the 4-3-3 normal formation depending on the right centre-back, usually Jade Rose, to dribble forward to find a passing option to the centre-forward who drops to receive, having many options, as happened against France's 4-3-3 pressing shape in the two photos below.





The centre-forward succeeded in hold-up play, having two third-man passing options to the two attacking midfielders, while the right inside winger tried to run into the space behind him, as shown below.



DEFENSIVE PHASE

They prefer to press highly, getting the ball in the opponent's first third using a 4-3-3 shape, asking the right wing-back, Ashley Lawrence, to be the right midfielder. As shown in the photos below, they prefer to orient the opponent in a certain direction by asking the inside winger near the ball to run in a curved way to cut the passing lane to the opponent's right full-back. At the same time, the centre-forward covers the shadow of the opponent's six. When the opponent's right centre-back is forced toward the inside, the right midfielder goes to the opponent's left full-back. They succeeded in cutting the ball and had a dangerous chance after that.



This method also helps them with another thing: having a free midfielder, their six, especially against a 4-3-3 build-up. Let's know how!

In the first photo below, the same strategy is implemented by asking the centre-forward to shadow the six, which makes them 3v3 in the midfield without the help of the holding midfielder, who becomes free covering behind them, so if the left inside winger fails to close the passing lane to the opponent's right full-back, an easy shift happens by asking the left midfielder to press the full-back. In contrast, the free midfielder behind him goes to the opponent's eight. After that, the opponent's right full-back has no choice of passing.



TRANSITIONS

Starting with the defending transition, when they lose the ball in the final third, they prefer counter-pressing to get the ball back quickly. So you can find the right full-back trying to pass the ball to the right midfielder, but the pass is inaccurate. Three players around the ball go to chase the ball while the far full-back comes back to be three defenders at the back, as shown in the photos below.



In the attacking transition, they depend heavily on targeting the wide wing-backs quickly before the opponents succeed in reorganising themselves. As we have explained, they defend with four at the back and attack with only three by asking the left full-back to be the left wing-back and the right full-back to be the right centre-back, so this shift suddenly shocks the opponents, as shown in the two photos below.



FORWARDS

Beverly Priestman has many diverse choices in the three forward positions as most of them play in many positions as a striker or a winger, which is good for the team increasing the choices and fluidity in the game. Still, we think Aston Villa's player, Adriana Leon, will be the

first choice as the centre-forward despite being a winger. As the right and left inside wingers, we think Janine Beckie and Cloé Lacasse will be the first choices, considering that Jordyn Huitema, Evelyne Viens and Deanne Rose may fight for a place in the starting XI.

Jordyn Huitema can also play as a ten, which is a good option in case the structure needs to be changed tactically.

MIDFIELDERS

Regarding the two flying wing-backs, the coach switched between wingers and full-backs to achieve balance, defend or attack regarding the opponent and the match conditions. Still, we think that Ashley Lawrence and Jayde Riviere will probably be the first choices. Still, Janine Beckie can also play as a left wing-back, and she performed well in this position.

The first choices as the two central midfielders will remain Jessie Fleming and Julia Grosso, but we think that Simi Awujo may fight Grosso for the second position in midfield next to Fleming.

DEFENDERS

Beverly Priestman relies on three centre-backs, who will probably be Jade Rose, Vanessa Gilles, and Kadeisha Buchanan, from the right to the left. Shelina Zadorsky is also a good option on the bench. We should mention that they are diverse: Jade Rose can play as a normal centre-back in four or three at the back, Vanessa Gilles is the strongest defensively, and Kadeisha Buchanan is brave enough to dribble forward.

KEY PLAYER

Chelsea's star, Ashley Lawrence, may be their key player because of her technical and tactical quality. She can play as a right wing-

back in attacking and a right midfielder during pressing. She can also play as a left full-back with good accuracy in crossing with her left. Her technical strengths are her speed, runs, dribbling, and crossing.

In the photos below, you can see her as a flying right wing-back. She has an intelligent and fast run and then sends a good cross, but the striker can't control the ball.



In the photos below, it is clear that she can fill the left side with the same quality. She can intelligently choose the time of the run, and she has the ability to run quickly and send an accurate cross with the left.



As evidence of her dribbling skill, you can see the distance she carries the ball in the first two photos below, so she is an effective option during transitions. After that, she passes the defender, trying to shoot with her left, but it hits the defender.



Moreover, she has good vision and excellent decisions to see the gaps in the defence line and passes it from the first touch, as shown in the two photos below.



TOURNAMENT PREDICTION

It is difficult to predict results in such a big event. Still, given their being eighth, above all the teams in the group except France, in the latest World Ranking, their gold medal at Tokyo 2020 and their good performance in different phases, as we have explained above, we may predict that they will pass the group stage, especially as the top-two teams in each group and the two best third-place teams advance to the knockout stage — Canada will likely face tough competition from

Colombia for second spot in this group, with relying on being one of the best third-placed sides a real possibility.

After that, they hope to keep their gold medal or get a silver or bronze medal, at least. However, their path after the group stage may immensely affect the result, and it has many possibilities.



2024 OLYMPICS GROUP A

ALI RILEY



NEW ZEALAND

NEW ZEALAND

LUIS KIRCHER // @LUISKIRCHER

As the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris approach, anticipation builds for New Zealand's women's national football team, affectionately known as the Football Ferns. With a rich history dating back to the early 20th century, the team has steadily evolved and established itself on the international stage. This year's Olympic campaign is a significant opportunity for the Football Ferns to showcase their growth and competitiveness against some of the world's top teams.

The Football Ferns' journey has been marked by perseverance and milestones. From their early days of organised league play in the 1970s to their pioneering victory in the 1975 Asian Cup, the team has consistently demonstrated resilience and determination. Over the years, they have faced formidable challenges and achieved remarkable successes, such as their historic win against the USA in 1987 and their participation in multiple FIFA Women's World Cup tournaments. Now, as they prepare for the Olympics, the Football Ferns aim to build on their legacy and make a significant impact in Paris, drawing on their experience, tactical acumen, and a strong sense of national pride.

The Football Ferns have shown considerable progress in recent years, with a focus on developing young talent and enhancing their tactical approach. Under the guidance of their coaching staff, the team has been working diligently to refine their strategies and build a cohesive unit capable of competing at the highest level. The Olympics present a platform for these efforts to come to fruition, as the team faces off against some of the best in women's football.

PREDICTED STARTING XI

New Zealand's women's national football team enters the Olympics 2024 in Paris with a sense of cautious optimism. While they

have shown growth and improvement in recent years, they are not yet on par with football powerhouses like Spain, USWNT, Australia, and Canada. Hosting the recent Women's World Cup with Australia provided valuable experience and exposure, helping them become more competitive on the global stage.

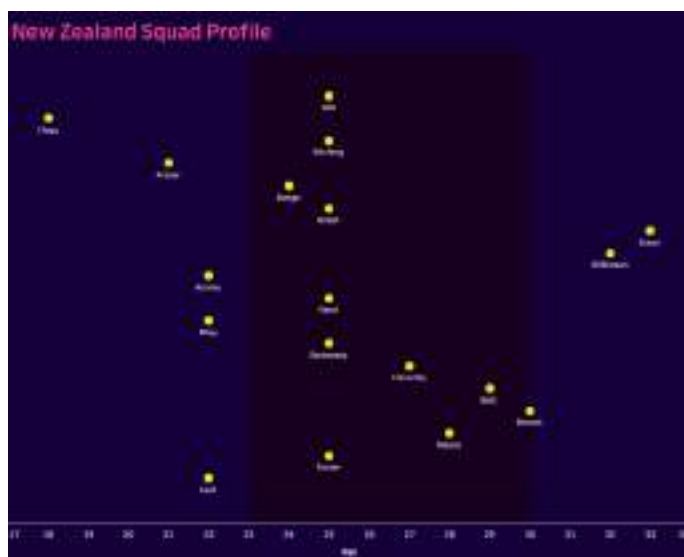
As New Zealand prepares for the Olympics 2024 in Paris, their squad presents a blend of experience and youthful promise. The Football Ferns, aiming to make a significant impact on the international stage, have a well-balanced team featuring solid defensive talents, a hardworking midfield, and promising forwards.

The current squad boasts some promising talents and a solid defensive lineup, with players like Katie Bowen, Ali Riley, and CJ Bott providing stability and experience at the back. However, the team still struggles with consistency and quality in the midfield and attack, which has been a significant barrier in their past tournaments.



Behind the likely starting XI, New Zealand boasts considerable depth. Victoria Esson, at 33, provides a reliable backup option in goal, with her experience and shot-stopping ability being valuable assets. Defensively, Elizabeth Anton and Meikayla Moore offer depth, with Anton capable of playing both central and full-back positions and Moore's versatility allowing her to cover multiple defensive roles. In midfield, Malia Steinmetz and Rebecca Burrows provide additional options. Steinmetz, at 25, is known for her ball-winning skills and composure under pressure, making her a crucial part of the midfield rotation. Burrows, at 21, brings youthful energy and potential, offering fresh legs and enthusiasm. In attack, Jacqui Hand and Ava Pritchard add further depth. Hand, at 25, can play across the front line, adding versatility to the attacking options, while Pritchard, despite her young age of 18, shows great promise with her speed and goal-scoring instincts.

However, the team does have its weaknesses. Despite having solid players, New Zealand lacks midfielders who can dominate games at the highest level. Additionally, the team sometimes struggles to create and convert chances against top-tier defences, leading to inconsistent attacking performances.



New Zealand's squad for the Olympics 2024 in Paris offers a blend of experience and promise, with strong defensive players and a hardworking

midfield. The team's success will largely depend on their ability to consistently create and finish scoring opportunities. If key players like Bowen, Bott, and Wilkinson can perform at their best, and the team can find a way to maximize their attacking potential, they might surprise a few teams.

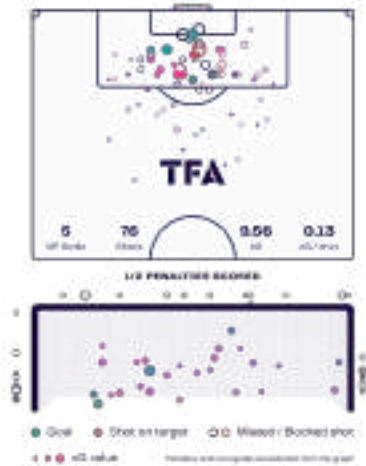
ATTACKING PHASE

New Zealand's attacking approach is characterised by a resilient and strategic playstyle, aiming to maximise their opportunities despite facing challenges in creating a high volume of chances. The team often struggles to generate numerous scoring opportunities and frequently relies on converting limited chances, as indicated by their lower percentile rankings in various offensive statistics. This tendency to "live mostly on scraps" highlights their difficulty in consistently penetrating defences and creating clear-cut chances.

However, there are positive aspects to their attacking approach that offer hope and demonstrate their potential to compete effectively. One notable strength is their efficiency when they do manage to create shooting opportunities. Despite their overall low percentile ranking for shots on goal, New Zealand ranks around the median for shots on target. This indicates that when they do get into promising positions, they have a decent success rate in testing opposing goalkeepers. It underscores the importance of not underestimating them, as they can be dangerous if allowed to advance into threatening areas.

NEW ZEALAND SHOTS

All games from Friendlies Women 2024, FIFA Women's World Cup 2023 Australia/New Zealand



While New Zealand faces challenges in creating a high volume of scoring opportunities, their attacking approach leverages the efficiency and skills of key players like Percival and Chance. Their ability to convert limited chances and manipulate defences offers hope for competitive performances, making them a team that opponents must remain vigilant against. The Football Ferns' resilience and strategic play highlight their potential to make an impact at the Olympics despite the inherent disadvantages in their attacking play.

DEFENSIVE PHASE

New Zealand's defensive approach is characterised by a structured and determined effort to protect their goal area. Despite their poor run of form, which is reflected in their defensive statistics, the team demonstrates a commendable level of effort and organisation in their defensive play. However, their low success rate in winning defensive and aerial duels indicates a gap in quality that hinders their ability to consistently keep opponents at bay.

One of the key strengths of New Zealand's defensive strategy is their clear plan for defending once they lose possession. The team's defensive structure is simple yet effective, involving their back four coming together with the nearest player moving out to press the ball.

The remaining defenders focus on covering the middle and potential passing options, aiming to force the opposing team to play sideways or backward, thereby disrupting their momentum. This approach highlights New Zealand's ability to make it difficult for opponents to find clear paths to goal, as seen in their efforts to close down spaces and limit progress.

However, New Zealand's predictability in their defensive tactics can be a significant disadvantage. Opponents often figure out ways to dismantle their system and exploit the resulting vulnerabilities.

NEW ZEALAND SHOTS AGAINST

All games from Friendlies Women 2024, FIFA Women's World Cup 2023 Australia/New Zealand



While New Zealand's defensive approach is organised and shows a clear understanding of their game plan, it also reveals a need for flexibility and adaptability. Relying solely on a predictable defensive structure can leave them vulnerable to teams that have studied and prepared for their tactics. To improve their defensive resilience, New Zealand might benefit from devising alternative strategies that can be employed when their primary system is compromised. By introducing more unpredictability and adaptability into their defensive play, they can better manage the threats posed by their opponents and reduce the likelihood of their structure being broken down.

TRANSITIONS

New Zealand's approach to transitions is a mix of vulnerability and potential threat, depending largely on their execution and the ability of their key players. Their predictable nature in transitioning from defense to offense

has often been exploited by opponents, yet when they manage to break free from their rigid patterns, they demonstrate an ability to create significant scoring opportunities.

A notable disadvantage in New Zealand's transitional play is their tendency to form a compact back three immediately upon losing possession. This predictability has been recognized and exploited by opponents, who have pressed forward to outnumber New Zealand's defenders in their own third. By isolating the three defenders from the rest of the team, opponents create and utilise space on either side to generate goal-scoring chances.

However, when New Zealand successfully transitions from defence to attack, they can be quite threatening. Key players play pivotal roles in creating opportunities during these transitions. Yet, the player who perhaps has the most significant influence is Daisy Steinmetz. Sitting deep, Steinmetz provides balance and is instrumental in initiating attacks from the back due to her excellent ball control and spatial awareness.

The main advantage of New Zealand's transitional approach is their ability to capitalize on quick, decisive movements when they successfully execute their game plan. Their key players, particularly in the midfield, have the skill to control the ball and make rapid decisions that can catch opponents off guard.

In contrast, the significant disadvantage lies in their predictability and the ease with which opponents can anticipate and counter their movements. This predictability often leads to dangerous situations where New Zealand's defensive structure is breached, and they concede goal-scoring opportunities to their opponents.

DEFENDERS

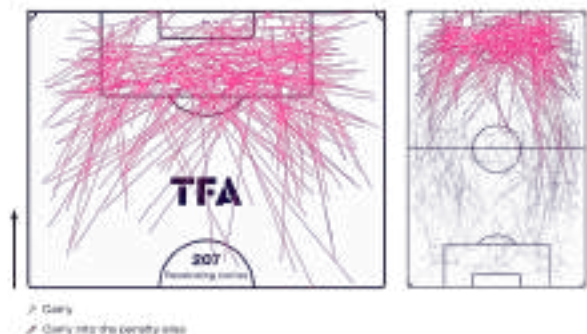
In goal, Anna Leat is expected to start. At 22, she has shown significant promise with her quick reflexes and ability to command the penalty area. Despite her youth, Leat has already gained valuable international experience, making her a reliable presence between the posts. The defensive line is likely to feature Claudia Foster at left-back, Abby Moore and Katie Bowen as the central defenders, and CJ Bott at right-back. Foster, at 25, offers a blend of defensive solidity and the ability to support attacks down the left flank. Moore, aged 28, provides experience and composure, making her a key figure in defence, while Bowen, at 30, brings versatility and leadership, crucial for the team's defensive organisation. Bott, aged 29, offers defensive strength and the ability to contribute to the attack, making her a dynamic presence on the right flank.

MIDFIELDERS

Annalie Longo and Daisy Cleverley are expected to play central roles in the midfield, with Gabi Rennie and Grace Jale on the wings. Longo, aged 27, is known for her creativity and vision, which are essential for linking defence and attack. Her passing ability helps control the tempo of the game, while Cleverley, at 25, is recognised for her work rate and ability to break up play, providing vital energy in midfield. Rennie, aged 22, brings pace and dribbling skills, making her a constant threat down the right wing. Her ability to deliver crosses adds to the attacking

NEW ZEALAND PENETRATING CARRIES

All games from Friendlies Women 2024, FIFA Women's World Cup 2023, Australia/New Zealand



options. On the left wing, Jale, also 25, is adept at taking on defenders and cutting inside to create scoring opportunities. Her versatility allows her to contribute both in attack and defence.

FORWARDS

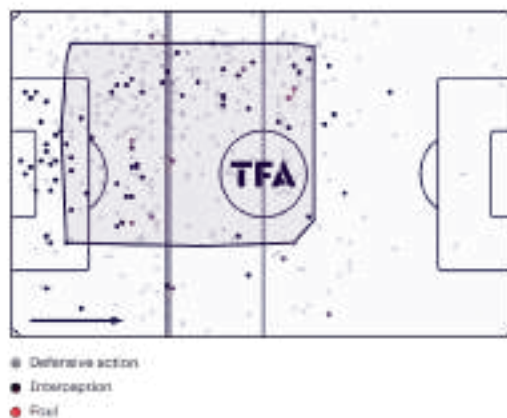
Up front, Hannah Wilkinson and Rosie White are expected to lead the line. Wilkinson, at 32, is an experienced forward known for her goal-scoring ability and physical presence. Her finishing skills and experience make her the focal point of the attack. White, also 32, is a seasoned forward known for her intelligent movement and clinical finishing. Her partnership with Wilkinson is crucial for the team's offensive output.

KEY PLAYER

Katie Bowen is a vital player for New Zealand's national team, known for her versatility and leadership. Primarily a defender, Bowen is adept at playing both in central defence and as a full-back, showcasing her adaptability and tactical awareness. Her experience spans several leagues and teams, providing her with a wealth of knowledge and skills that she brings to the field.

One of Bowen's significant strengths is her defensive solidity. She is highly effective in one-on-one situations, using her excellent positioning and anticipation to thwart opposing attackers. Her physical presence is another key asset; at 173 cm tall, she is strong in aerial duels and capable of handling physical battles with strikers. This physicality, combined with her tactical understanding, makes her a formidable defender.

K. BOWEN DEFENSIVE TERRITORY



Bowen also excels in playmaking from the back. She has a high passing accuracy for a defender, which allows her to initiate attacks and provide critical long passes to her teammates. Her ability to deliver precise long balls can break opposition lines and create scoring opportunities. This playmaking ability is complemented by her vision and decision-making, making her a valuable asset not only in defence but also in transitioning the ball forward.

However, Bowen has some weaknesses that need addressing. Her defensive reactions can sometimes be slow, particularly against quick and agile forwards. She occasionally hesitates in one-on-one situations, which can give attackers an advantage. Additionally, her success rate in aerial duels, while decent, could be improved with better timing and technique.

Another area for improvement is her consistency in defensive aggressiveness. Bowen can be less decisive in her defensive actions, sometimes opting for less aggressive interventions when a more forceful approach might be necessary. Enhancing her decisiveness and aggression in defensive scenarios could elevate her performance and make her an even more reliable defender.

TOURNAMENT PREDICTION

Historically, New Zealand has found it challenging to advance beyond the group stage in World Cups, highlighting the gap between them and the world's elite teams. While their defence is commendable, the lack of world-class players in midfield and forward positions often leaves them struggling to create and capitalise on scoring opportunities.

At the Olympics, New Zealand will likely face tough competition from top-tier teams. Their ability to advance past the group stage will heavily depend on their defensive resilience and the ability of their key players to step up and perform under pressure. If Bowen, Riley, and Bott can anchor a robust defensive effort and the team can find a way to generate more consistent attacking threats, they might have a chance to surprise some of their higher-ranked opponents.

However, given their historical performance and current squad limitations, it is realistic to expect that New Zealand will face an uphill battle to progress beyond the group stage. While they may put up commendable fights and possibly secure some points, reaching the knockout rounds would be an impressive achievement for the Football Ferns.



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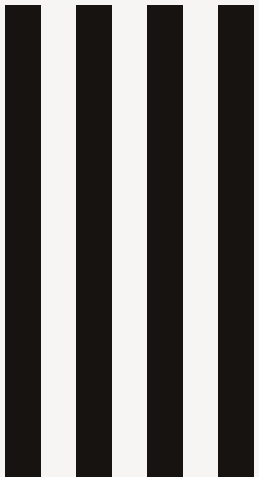
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TOTAL FOOTBALL ANALYSIS

2024 OLYMPICS

GRUBUP

**USA
ZAMBIA
GERMANY
AUSTRALIA**



2024 OLYMPICS GROUP B

SOPHIA SMITH



USA

USA

The long-time Chelsea manager, whose side won the WSL over Manchester City on the final day of the season, is two games into her tenure. She'll have two additional matches before jumping on a plane for Paris.

Even with the transitional period under Twila Kilgore and limited time in camp, the former UNC Tar Heel has already made tremendous strides with her new side.

In preparation for the Olympics, this tactical analysis will focus entirely on the USWNT's games against South Korea. Hayes and her staff, which includes former Total Football Analysis analyst Cam Meighan, have direct contact with the players at this stage and can fully transition to her style of play. This analysis examines the tactics on display during the South Korea friendlies and gives an idea of what we can expect from the former Chelsea manager.

PREDICTED STARTING XI

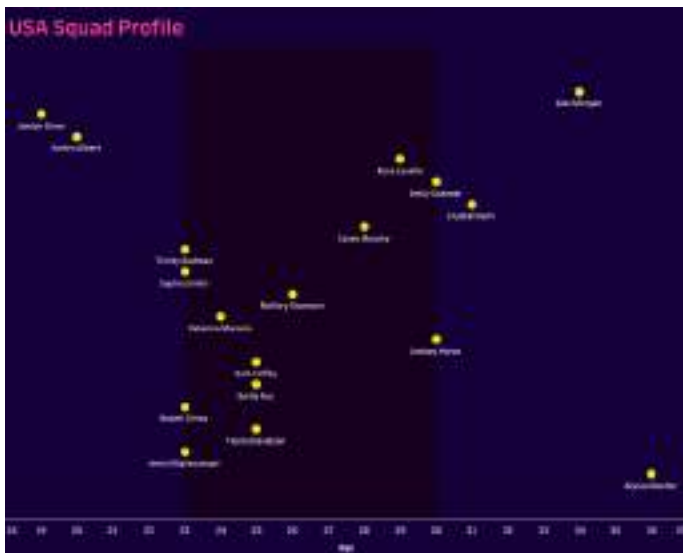


Look for Hayes to use a 4-2-3-1 system with her new side. Those first two matches give an indication not only of her preferred system but also a hint as to who she might pick in each role.

This is certainly a side with positional locks, such as Naomi Girma at centreback, Sam Coffey and Lindsey Horan at the double pivot, and a front three of Mollory Swanson, Sophia Smith, and Trinity Rodman. Of this group, Coffey is the one question mark. An injury sustained in NWSL play saw her leave in walking boot, though the ailment is supposedly not serious.

Tierna Davidson looks the likeliest candidate to partner with Girma centrally. With USA's 3-2 setup at the back when in possession, a centreback could fit into that right side to free a player like Jenna Nighswonger on the left, but Emily Fox looked comfortable with that role and is the likeliest candidate to start at right back. Monitoring Fox's performances as the right-centreback when the USA is in possession will give an indication of Hayes' thoughts.

Centre-attacking mid features another interesting battle. The incumbent and arguably the USWNT's most creative player in recent years, Rose Lavelle, is locked in a tight battle with Catarina Macario. It's a tight enough battle where either player could step into that role. Look for some degree of rotation at the position, both in the starting XI and with substitutions. Lavelle may have a slight advantage after strong performances in the South Korea friendlies, but this is a tight battle.



In terms of the squad profile, our projected 18 to make the trip falls mostly within those peak playing years. Goalkeeper Alyssa Naeher and veteran forward Alex Morgan fall to one end of the chart, with Crystal Dunn, Horan and Emily Sonnett close behind.

Otherwise, this is a young team, signalling the transition from the 2019 World Cup-winning squad. Some of the possible alternates include a pair of teenagers in 17-year-old Lily Yohannes and 18-year-old Olivia Moultrie.

ATTACKING PHASE

Hayes has brought a new look to the USA's attacking tactics. With a 3-2 rest defence at the back, this is a side that will frequently set up in a 3-2-5, but they're also highly adaptable. If there's a need to draw the opposition's outside backs higher up the pitch, they can take on a 3-4-3 look instead. The depth of the wingers and the visual cues to signal a high, central player dropping into midfield make this a clever group.



Within the 3-2-5, they'll look for opportunities to drop one of those high central players into the space between the lines. This is where Macario and Lavelle come into play. While any of the attacking midfielders or the central forward can drop into those spaces, it's often the creative midfielder who takes that initiative.

One other note is that the midfield is very fluid as well. Coffey will typically remain deep, but Horan has license to rotate positionally with anyone ahead of her.

South Korea dropped into a mid-block, often with a midfield line of confrontation, so the USA's build-out was rarely tested. What we did see is how this new-look side will create and exploit spaces when up against a mid-block. With typically one player in the wings and the remaining eight field players keeping more central positions, the USA used that overload to stretch South Korea's lines vertically, which created pockets of space between the lines.



Once the USA entered the final third, those high numbers gave them flexibility in how they could attack the box. In this instance, it was a nice combination in which Macario played Smith, who tried to lead Rodman into the box. The final pass wasn't completed, but it was a great idea and an example of the new look USA's threat in the final third.



The individual talent is still there, but this is an American side that is growing into a more cohesive, collective style. Hayes's game model will continue to evolve as she spends time with her new team, but the early results are very promising.

DEFENSIVE PHASE

When opponents settle into a low block, a combination of runs in behind and playing off of a high central player helps the USA get through centrally. While they will generally have a player out wide for the simple pass into a cross, the team showed it has the ability to quickly connect through the middle to beat the low block. Here, Girma played into Smith who found the run of Swanson for a well-worked goal.

With two clean sheets against South Korea, the American defence looked well-organised and ready to deal with the opposition's attempts to play forward. The side routinely used a 4-4-2 mid-block as their base setup. Part of this may be due to the fact that South Korea rarely tried to play their way out of the back. Could we see an American high press at some point in the Olympics? Definitely, but the early feedback is that the team will sit a little bit deeper.



Within that 4-4-2 setup, it's the #10 who steps forward to join the #9. The #7 and #11 will drop even with the pivots and are responsible for tracking as deep as necessary to maintain the team's defensive shape.

Even though this American side is better equipped to break opponents down centrally and uses collective movements to beat the opponent, they're still most dangerous when they can run at the backline. In the first game against South Korea, the fourth and final goal came when Lavelle received between the lines and ran at the Korean defenders. Her pass to Swanson was a simple one, but that more direct movement produced the goal.



This includes dropping in the box to help defend in a low block. When South Korea did manage to get numbers up the pitch, the American wingers were quick to drop deep and very disciplined with their approach.





The USWNT's group stage opponents will offer a different level of threat than the South Koreans, but even against a quality opponent, the American side was difficult to break down and resolute when needed. It was a quality defensive showing and certainly two games that Hayes will look to build on.

TRANSITIONS

The final sequence in this section comes from a transitional moment, but if we are going to look at what an American high press may look like at the Olympics, this is a pretty good example. To slow the Korean transition, the USA limited their progress up the pitch. Three passes in a triangular movement left the Koreans right where they had started the attack.

The USA's attacking transitions will be something to watch. With all the pace and quality they have up top, this group is dangerous. Zambia will surely sit a little bit deeper, but it will be interesting to see how the Germans and Australians look to contain American counterattacks in more even games.

As we can see with the American approach, they've greatly condensed the playing area and have taken a woman-marking approach near the ball. There are no open short or intermediate options. If South Korea wants to play out on the ground, they do so at their own risk.

Before we dig into the USA's counterattacking tactics, let's start with their defensive transitions. They are a side that will counterpress aggressively, but they find a nice balance between counterpressing to win the ball and simply preventing the opposition from playing forward.



When the opponent is able to break the first wave of the counterpress, USA's rest defence structure can help limit the damage. We got a good look of how that 3-2 rest defence at the back allows the USA to respond to opposition counterattacks. They did well to take away the middle and delay the South Korean attack so that the Americans could recover numbers behind the ball.

In fact, they did look to play out through the left wing-back. Lavelle quickly closed space, won the ball and started the American counterattack.



Now, moving to their counterattacking, the USA's midfield setup in the 4-4-2 press is fairly narrow.



When the Americans win the ball, they always have someone centrally who can exploit open space. In this example, it's Horan playing to Swanson, who's able to run between the lines and dribble at the Korean defenders.



In that second game, Dunn's goal was set up by a low recovery, and her forward pass to Alex Morgan. The striker was able to turn and carry the ball up the pitch. Meanwhile, her teammates rushed forward in support, finding gaps in the Korean press.



Nighswonger made a brilliant run up the left wing and got herself into a crossing position. When she sent a cross, the Americans had a 4v3 advantage in the central area of the box, as well as positional advantages at the near and far posts. It was a beautiful delivery by the left-back, setting up a close-range tap-in from Dunn.



Given the difficulty of the USA's group and the general strength of the field, the USA's prolific counterattacking may very well prove decisive in the tournament. As opponents look to retain more of the ball and commit more numbers up the pitch, they'll play into the American's hands, creating the attacking conditions the USA wants.

Keep an eye on this counterattack.

FORWARDS

The expected front line of Swanson, Smith, and Rodman gives the USWNT a formidable group up top. All three players can stretch back lines, drop into midfield to receive, and beat opponents 1v1. Smith and Swanson especially have that box presence and finishing capability, allowing them to be decisive players in each match.

The 18-player roster does limit support up top. Look for Alex Morgan to make the squad and give the USA a different look up top when she is in. She'll offer the holdup play and aerial ability that you don't get with Smith. Crystal Dunn figures to factor into the front line as well. Jaedyn Shaw will likely see some time up top as well. Olivia Moultrie is our odd player out, but she could very well make the squad as an alternate.

MIDFIELDERS

In midfield, Horan, Coffey, Lavelle and Macario are the likeliest to see time. Korbin Albert offers another strong, young presence in midfield and will get her share of minutes in the tournament.

Much like Dunn's flexibility to play either as a wide forward or an outside-back, Emily Sonnett offers positional flexibility for the USA, which is vital at the Olympics. She can play anywhere along the backline or as a holding midfielder. Look for Hayes to lean on the versatility of Sonnett to close out games and to offer some rotation in the group stages.

There's some exceptional talent that doesn't quite make this group. Veteran Andi Sullivan looks like an outsider at this point but is still a solid option in that double-pivot role. Lily Yohannes, the teenage Ajax player, also showed very well in the recent friendlies and is certainly in contention for an alternate role, if not the final 18.

DEFENDERS

Girma and Davidson are the likeliest to start at centre back; this is where we can also see Sonnett for the possible addition of Casey Krueger. Chicago Red Stars' Sam Staab may also get the nod; if not with the match day team, then certainly the possibility that she is included as an alternate.

At outside-back, Fox and Nighswonger are the likely starters with Dunn offering an option at the back as well. If Krueger makes the 18, she can also play out wide, which may help her chances of making that final roster.

Backline depth will be the most interesting of Hayes's selections. Given that Dunn and Sonnett can play along the backline, she may opt for leaner depth at the back.

In goal, expect Naehner and Casey Murphy as the two to make the 18.

KEY PLAYER

Our key player is the prolific Sophia Smith. Portland Thorns' #9 is a prolific goal scorer and will move back to the centre of the pitch now that Swanson is healthy. With firepower along the front line, Smith will have the freedom to pick her matchups and use her pace to stretch the opposition's back line.

A lethal finisher, Smith also moves in the box well, finding pockets of space in the opposition's defensive setup and using her anticipation

and quickness to get into quality shooting opportunities.

She won't lack service with this group of players and the tactics we're likely to see from Hayes. Look for a big tournament from Smith and better production from the frontline in this tournament.

TOURNAMENT PREDICTION

This is a tough prediction to make for a team in transition, both with a coaching staff and, to a lesser degree, with some of the players rising to more prominent roles.

The side will certainly look to improve upon their World Cup disappointment. Getting out of the group is a must, but there simply are no easy games at the Olympics. Their quarter-final matchup will inevitably pit them against a top-10 team.

By USWNT standards, winning the tournament is the objective. They should have the strength to reach at least the semifinals, but that's not the objective. Only gold will do, even if that means they have to get through a difficult group and the likes of Spain, France, Japan, Brazil, and Canada to do so. They've already beaten those last three teams in 2024, so there will be a sense of belief that they can do it again and beat the top sides from Europe.

As Hayes and the Americans enter the spotlight, they're going for gold in Paris.

2024 OLYMPICS GROUP B

BARBRA BANDA



ZAMBIA

ZAMBIA

DAVID ASTILL // @DAVIDPASTILL21

The African women's international game has long been dominated by the likes of South Africa and Nigeria, who have produced some outstanding talent and who have generally been recognised as the ones to beat on the continent.

However, in the last few years, others have been looking to close the gap to those two nations, none more so than Zambia, who exploded onto the scene back in 2021 at the Tokyo Olympics and who have shown as the last few years have gone by that they hold no fear and will be a match for anyone who stumbles across their path.

Whilst their campaign three years ago did not produce much in the way of success, with their group games ending in a heavy loss to the Netherlands, a narrow defeat to Brazil and a breathtaking 4-4 draw against China, there was no doubt that they had made the world sit up and take notice of what they could do. Fast forward to now, and they are back at the Games, looking to improve on their fortunes in Japan, and, as this tactical analysis will indicate, they are not a team that anyone should underestimate.

PREDICTED STARTING XI



With Zambia favouring a 4-4-2 formation in most matches, their key priority when it comes to selecting their team is balance, with it clear that they need players who can help them to be compact and tough to break down but who can also push forward as soon as the ball has been regained.

With that in mind, the goalkeeper needs to be a player capable of both organising those ahead of them and of distributing across multiple distances, and both are things that regular starter Hazel Nali thrives in. However, with her injured and set to miss the tournament, an alternative will be required, and the most logical choice appears to be Catherine Musonda, who missed both of their final qualifying matches against Morocco due to injury but who featured in the previous round against Ghana. Therefore, if she is selected in the final squad,

it seems likely that she will be given the nod once again.

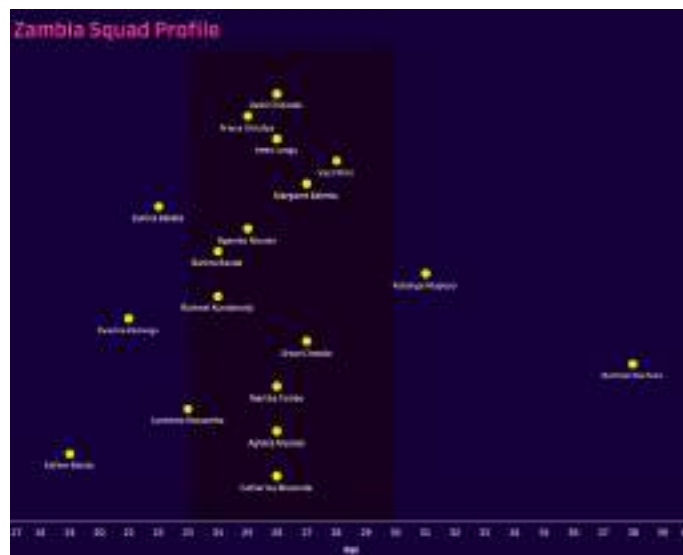
Ahead of her, Zambia also have a few problems to solve, with there being question marks around right-back Margaret Belemu and central defender Agness Musase. If selected, then the latter is likely to be included in the starting XI, with her partnership with Green Buffaloes Women teammate Lushomo Mweemba well-established, but Esther Banda impressed against Morocco whilst deputising at right-back and so it is not out of the question that she could be handed that role again, with Belemu potentially included on the bench.

The midfield is where Zambia need players with specific attributes, with the fact that there are no holding midfielders or playmakers in the team, meaning that those in the central positions have to be effective at both shielding the backline and offering support in attack. With that in mind, it is very likely that Grace Chanda will start matches, should she be included in the team, with her always a key name in the Zambian ranks and one that they rely on both with and without the ball. Her partner in that area is less certain, but the fact that Evarine Katongo has impressed in the central third and has the ability to offer what Zambia need means that she also has a good chance of being included.

Zambia likes to attack in numbers when they have the ball, which means that those on the wings have to be adept at getting forward to stretch opposing defensive lines out. The duo of Racheal Nachula and Bay FC's Racheal Kundananji certainly offer that in abundance. Kundananji, in particular, will not be a player that opposing sides should ignore, which is why her presence might help unsettle opposing backlines.

At the top of the field, Zambia once again have options and it will depend on what head coach Bruce Mwape is looking for as to who is

handed a start in the front line. Both Kundananji and Nachula are options in those roles should there be a desire for them to get further inside the pitch, but the fact that both are likely to at least start the tournament as wide attackers means that Kabange Mupopo could partner the aforementioned Banda in leading the attack, should the former be included in the 18 players heading to France.



When breaking down Zambia's squads in previous tournaments, what has always been clear is that they like to have the same group of players in each one as they look to develop partnerships around the field. With that in mind, most of those likely to be on the plane are players who have been selected beforehand and who are, therefore, at the height of their careers, with them having the experience to know how to deal with the pressure of performing at this level but also having the ability to feature in multiple games across a short time span.

That does not mean that they look down on more experienced options, and the fact that both of those over the age of 30 have been named in the potential starting XI does highlight that they do have a need for long-serving players to glue the team together. However, the fact that there are only two who could be included in the 18-player list does show that Zambia don't rely too heavily on those who are nearing the end of their careers, and it could be that they are the

ones who swap in and out of the team as Mwape looks to make tweaks ahead of each outing.

ATTACKING PHASE



It has been established already in this scout report that Zambia are a side who put a lot of emphasis on their attacking play, but what is important to remember is that they are not only a one-person team. Instead, Banda is just one of a number who can test opposing rearguards, and having a rich variety of players who can get up the field is one of the reasons that they have averaged two goals per game this year and scored 1.78 times per outing in 2023.

Being able to rotate who is providing the key threat becomes increasingly essential when opponents look to close Banda down, and Ghana were one side whose game plan revolved around limiting her influence on proceedings. In this case, Susan Ama Duah is the one tasked with preventing her from gaining any territory once the ball arrives at her feet, and it did perhaps appear as though that would be enough to force Zambia into sending the ball backwards.

However, Ghana ignored the presence of Mupopo and Kundananji either side of the ball, and that proved to be costly as Banda was able to find the latter and set up the only goal of the game. Therefore, even if the Orlando Pride striker, who has been in fine form in the NWSL so far, is marked out of the match, teams have to be aware of other players who can replicate what she offers; otherwise, they will end up going the same way.



Zambia's attacking play is a team effort, and this theme has been shown in other ways. In this case, the ball is on the far side of the field, and both Banda and Kundananji have made their way into the goal area to provide immediate targets for the delivery. However, the key players to point out here are Katongo and Chanda, who have taken up positions just behind them and are providing a secondary attacking presence.

Having them around the goal area proves to be critical in this situation as the Republic of Ireland manage to clear the initial delivery through Liverpool Women captain Niamh Fahey beating Kundananji in the air, but they don't manage to end the chance completely as the ball only falls at the feet of Katongo. As a result, Zambia can keep their opponents on the back foot and can maintain the pressure on them, which is another reason that they will be a tough side to keep out.

DEFENSIVE PHASE



As mentioned at the beginning of the analysis, Zambia's desire as soon as they lose the ball is to be solid at the back and to ensure that they never make it too easy for opponents to break them down.

However, as is perhaps to be expected by a team who like to control games, they don't tend to sit back and wait for the ball to come to them, and instead, it is common to see them playing with a high backline and trying to regain possession as quickly as possible. In this case, that has seen Switzerland forward Alisha Lehmann closed down by Musase, and the fact that they as a team have won 53.1% of their defensive duels this year and succeeded in 66.4% of them last year indicates that this is not a one-off.

The downside of playing with a high backline, though is that it does leave space open behind for teammates to exploit, and that is what has led to Zambia conceding 1.5 goals per game this year and letting in 2.67 in 2023. In this case, whilst Lehmann was unable to find a way through, Switzerland did score just a couple of phases later through former Atlético Madrid Femenino forward Ana-Maria Crnogorčević, with her taking advantage of Belemu stepping out of line to send the ball into the back of the net, and so that is something that Zambia will have to be aware of when they make the trip to France.



This is not to say that Zambia always looks to press its opponents, though. There have been some games when they have shown adaptability. Against both Uzbekistan and North Macedonia in the 2023 Turkish Women's Cup (an annual friendly tournament), they realised that both sides were looking to send balls into the middle from the wings and so based their own tactics around staying back and ensuring that they won those first balls.

In this case, that proved to be a successful game plan to employ as North Macedonia midfielder Mila Talevska saw her cross easily gathered by Nali, and it is always important to be organised against them as they are a team who can threaten in central spaces if given the opportunity to do so, with the likes of KuPS Naiset's Gentjana Rochi and Nataša Andonova, formerly of Levante Femenino, among their ranks.

What that, therefore demonstrates is that Zambia can change their mentality depending on who they are coming up against, which will be vital if they are to put on a good showing when the Olympic action gets underway.

TRANSITIONS



The fact that Zambia set up in a 4-4-2 shape, which is not renowned for affording teams much positional freedom, means that they have needed to rely on the accuracy of their passing when constructing attacks. However, with 58.2% of their passes this year and 73.5% of them in 2023 finding their intended targets, it is clear that this is one of their strengths, and so is never something that concerns them, and this situation highlights how precise they can be.

However, whilst the pass from Kundananji to Banda is pinpoint and has allowed Zambia to move the ball from one end to the other in an instant, the key thing to point out is what happens after that, with Zambia pushing players up the field as soon as the ball had been shifted forwards in order to give themselves the best possible chance of keeping their attack alive.

Doing so was crucial here as Banda was at this stage on her own against a Costa Rica defensive line that were known for winning first balls under now-Monterrey Femenil head coach Amelia Valverde, and so the arrival of reinforcements ensured that Zambia were able to keep the pressure on even with their opponents initially clearing their lines through Mariana Benavides. It is details such as this that has seen 60% of their counterattacks in 2024 and 72% of them in 2023 ending in a shot on goal, and it would not be a surprise to see them employ similar tactics in transitional phases in France in order to be as productive as possible whenever they do have the ball.



As soon as possession has been conceded, Zambia's attention instantly turns back towards staying organised and keeping as much distance between the ball and their goal as possible, and the speed with which they get back and take up their positions is the key thing to note, with it demonstrating how well-drilled they are and how each player knows what they need to do as soon as their opponents look to push up the field.

As a result of that, opposing teams never find it easy to counterattack with much success against them, and Spain found that out here as Real Madrid Femenino full-back Oihane Hernández was able to pass inside the field towards Mariona Caldentey, despite being closed down quickly by Avell Chitundu, but the combined effort of Katongo and BIIK Shymkent's Ireen Lungu ensured that that was as far as Spain got.

Given that Zambia will be facing three teams in the USA, Germany, and Australia that will likely look to dominate the ball, they may need to rely on their defensive shape for long periods of their games. Their ability to be tough to break down will stand them in great stead as they look to frustrate their opponents and give themselves the best possible chance of reaching the knockout stages.

FORWARDS

With it now apparent what Zambia's tactical appearance will be, attention turns towards who they could take with them and who will give them the best possible chance of exerting their influence on the field. What will be crucial with only 18 places in the squad is versatility.

Including different profiles of players will be especially vital when it comes to the forward line, with both Banda and Mupopo tending to play high up the field and to offer target players. Hence, Zambia perhaps need someone who can help to bridge the gap and who can drop deeper at times in order to ensure that they can switch their game plan around in those games when staying high is not having the desired effect. Kundananji would be capable of offering that, but the inclusion of Prisca Chilufya could also help to give them that variety, with her demonstrating last season for Juárez Femenil that she is not only a player who can threaten opposing goals but who can create from behind the forward line too.

Any team that wants to succeed in tournaments needs to demonstrate tactical flexibility as they go on. No two games are ever the same, and the ability to alter the system and to switch the team's mentality will be vital if Zambia is to be at its best when the Olympics get underway later this month.

MIDFIELDERS

That theme of having players with different profiles continues when looking at Zambia's midfield options. Chanda and Katongo are likely to start most matches but tend to bring the same things to the table, thus providing the same issue as Banda and Mupopo.

However, having Lungu in the squad will undoubtedly remedy that. While she is at her best when playing further forward, she has been known to sit a little deeper in some games. As a result, she could come in when Zambia are under sustained pressure at the back to offer defensive protection while also giving whichever player she is deployed alongside greater freedom to push further up the pitch.

Therefore, again, Zambia might appear from their potential starting XI to be quite one-dimensional, but they have ways of introducing layers when necessary, and that will be critical as the matches go on.

DEFENDERS

When it comes to the defensive options that Zambia could take to France, there is less of a need for versatility and more for cover in the positions that they are slightly unsure about at this moment in time.

It has already been mentioned that Belemu, in particular, is a doubt due to her recent army training (with her being one of a number of players who serves in the Zambian armed forces alongside her football career), with Banda likely to be the main alternative at right-back if she is not included, but the other player that could join their defensive contingent and who could bring much-needed cover across the backline is Vast Phiri. At 28 years old, she has plenty of tournament experience that could be of enormous benefit to

Zambia as the matches go on, and so it would not be a surprise to see her included for that reason and because she has the ability to slot in wherever needed.

KEY PLAYER



Whilst there is no doubt that the spotlight will be on the attacking duo of Banda and Kundananji, given that they are currently the most expensive female footballers on the planet, the player who could prove to be critical to Zambia's hopes of making it out of their group stage is the aforementioned Chanda. Her ability to be an all-rounder on the field, as has been highlighted throughout this scout report, means that she will be a vital player for them both with and without the ball. Undoubtedly, each of Zambia's opponents will need to be aware of her presence and limit her influence if they are to prevent the African nation from settling into their rhythm.

Her key role once her team loses the ball is to lead their attempts to win it back as early as possible, and it is common to see her reading what is happening around her and making vital interceptions as a result. In this case, she anticipated the pass that Uzbekistan's left wing-back Umida Zoirova would make towards Irodakhon Turdalieva, which successfully disrupted their attempt to build an attack.

Doing so was vital in this match, as Uzbekistan had set up with a back three/five formation and had based their tactics around outflanking Zambia and negating their midfield threat. Chanda, by

making these contributions, prevented them from catching her side out where they were less protected.



Once her team have the ball, Chanda's focus turns instantaneously towards providing passing options in forward areas, with it already mentioned that she is a naturally attack-minded player who likes to operate as high up the field as possible. In this game, South Korea tended to sit back and focus on being defensively robust, so there was always space in front of their backline for Zambia to exploit. Chanda has taken advantage of that in her bid to ensure that Zambia can continually progress up the pitch.

However, the key point to mention here is that she makes her run before Kundananji has controlled the pass from Ochumba Lubandji, and that highlights once again how she is so adept at reading the game and at knowing what is going on around her. The move might not have led to anything due to the pass towards her being overhit, but there is no doubt that this will make Chanda such a dangerous player for opponents to leave unmarked during the upcoming tournament and underestimating her influence on their overall play will be perilous.

TOURNAMENT PREDICTION

There is no doubt when bringing everything together that Zambia have the potential to trouble their opponents, and they will enter this year's Olympic tournament with high hopes of improving on their 2021 showing as they look to

further demonstrate their potential to compete on the world stage.

However, given that they have been grouped with a rejuvenated USA (who will be eager to prove that they have turned a corner under former Chelsea Women manager Emma Hayes), a Germany team that looks like tough opponents, and an Australia side with quality rippling through their squad, the likelihood is that they will struggle to pick up enough points to make it out of the group stages, and so could fall just short.

Nevertheless, they are certainly an enjoyable team to watch and one that approaches games in the right way. They will certainly be worth keeping an eye on as the action unfolds.

2024 OLYMPICS GROUP B

JULE BRAND



GERMANY

GERMANY

BRANDON LISS // @BRANDTHEBEAST

The German Women's National team is back at the Olympic games, with DFB-Frauen looking to once again win Olympic gold, last doing so at the 2016 edition of the games. However, they find themselves placed in a potentially tricky group, matching up against Australia, the United States, and Zambia.

Interim coach Horst Hrubesch brings a very talented squad with him to France this summer. However, they have not necessarily hit many heights since he took over in very strange circumstances from Martina Voss-Tecklenburg after their group stage exit at last summer's World Cup. He has not been able to find the right formation or best players to utilise in his starting XI, something that many German fans will be concerned about with the tournament on the horizon.

However, Hrubesch's only goal is to win a gold medal this summer, with current Germany U17 coach Christian Wück replacing the 73-year-old after the 2024 Olympics. This tactical analysis will analyse the side in more detail and look at how Hrubesch can get the best out of this talented squad in his last tournament in charge.

PREDICTED STARTING XI



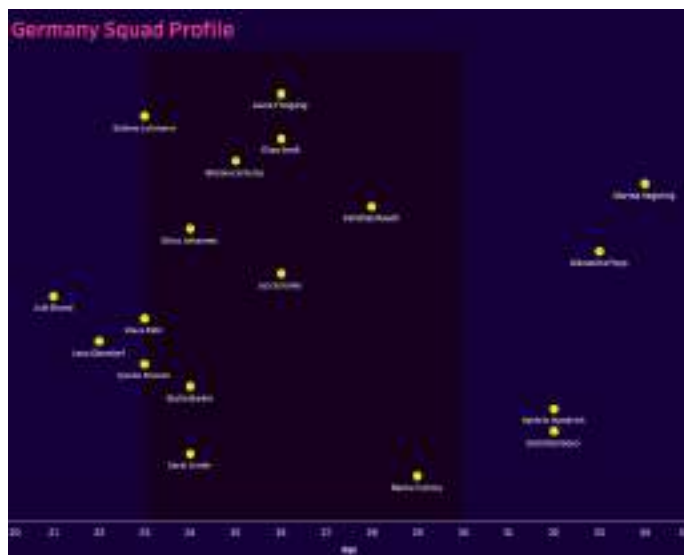
With such a talented squad at his disposal, it has sometimes seemed tough for Hrubesch to pick his best starting XI and formation. In recent matches, he has rotated between playing a 4-2-3-1, a 4-4-2, a 4-2-2-2, or even a 4-3-3. This constant change in formations and players has not helped Germany find a rhythm on the pitch. We have predicted Germany will line up in a 4-2-2-2 formation, but this may look more like a 4-4-2 in certain phases of the game, especially when the Germans are out of possession.

In goal, Wolfsburg #1 Merle Frohms looks set to start, with the 29-year-old establishing herself as Germany's preferred option in recent months. At left back, Sarai Linder looks likely to keep her place in the side, with 32-year-old Sara Doorsoun starting next to her as the left-sided centre-back. Her central defence partner will likely be Kathrin Hendrich, with the Wolfsburg defender being

a mainstay in the German defence in recent months. Athletic Bilbao centre-back Bibiane Schulze could also be a contender to start in one of the two centre-back positions, with the 25-year-old getting starts in recent matches under Hrubesch. Bayern Munich defender Giulia Gwinn looks set to be Germany's starting right back at this tournament, with the 24-year-old starting in every one of Germany's matches this calendar year.

Moving into the midfield, and this is where the selection headaches have happened recently for Hrubesch. The box midfield four has seemed to be the preferred choice for him in recent matches, with this being the formation of choice in their last two Olympic warm-up games against Poland. Lena Oberdorf is a lock for one of the two defensive midfield positions, with the 22-year-old Wolfsburg midfielder one of the stars of this German side. We have predicted that her partner in this deeper-lying position will be Chelsea midfielder Sjoeke Nüsken, but it could also well be Bayern Munich's Sydney Lohmann, that starts alongside Oberdorf. In the two advanced midfield positions, we feel Hrubesch will go with Klara Bühl alongside Jule Brand. The two attacking midfielders will likely have the ability to roam freely around the pitch and have the potential to drift into wider areas to support the forwards. 22-year-old Vivien Endemann could also be in line to start in this area of the pitch, but it is more likely she sees most of her minutes at this tournament coming off the bench.

In the front two, Germany have two of the best goalscoring forwards in women's football, with Bayern Munich's Lea Schüller and Wolfsburg's Alexandra Popp. These two will be going to France with one thing on their minds: scoring goals to guide their nation to a second goal medal in their history. Laura Freigang also offers Hrubesch another good forward option off the bench, with 13 goals for Eintracht Frankfurt in all competitions this past season.



The graphic above shows the age profile of Germany's squad at this tournament, and we can see how the majority of the squad are in or entering their prime footballing years. Most of the players are between the ages of 23 and 30, with Hrubesch also having a good mix of veteran players who will bring leadership and tournament nous, as well as a couple of under-23 players who are massive talents in Brand and Oberdorf.

ATTACKING PHASE

From an attacking perspective, Germany are a side that look to often be on the front foot in matches, looking to put pressure on the opposition from the start and hold the majority of possession over the course of 90 minutes. Due to this heavy attacking presence, the formational shape for Germany will change as they progress the ball into the attacking half of the pitch.



The figure above can give us a bit of a better idea of how Germany's shape tends to look when they are in possession. The 4-2-2-2 formation turns into more of a 4-2-4 at times, as we can see from the image above, with Hrubesch looking for his

side to have maximum width in attack, as the two attacking midfielders move into wider positions, which looks to stretch the opposition defence. Meanwhile, the weak side fullback will look to invert into more central positions to offer cover in central midfield when the ball is progressed into the attacking half. In contrast, the ball side fullback will look to either underlap or overlap in the wide channel, offering support in attack or being the provider.

One of the main goals in attack for Germany is to progress numbers into the box in attacks, with the ball commonly looking to be worked out into the wide channels. This allows the widely positioned attacking midfielders to drive at opposition fullbacks in possession, looking to drive past them before sending either crosses or low balls across goal into the box for runners to attack.



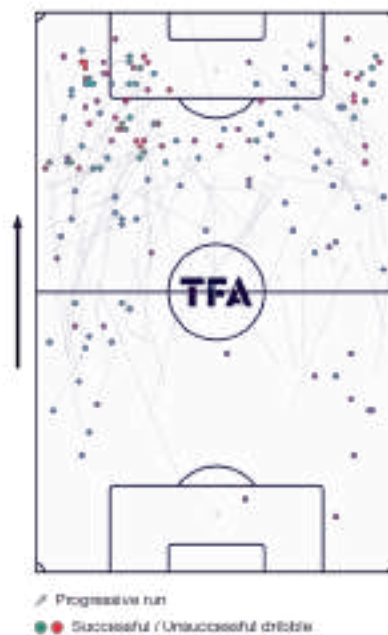
We just mentioned how Germany look to utilise width in their attacking moves and how they look to have a heavy presence in the penalty box to get on the end of crosses. The image above shows an excellent example of this. In this phase of play for Germany against Denmark, the ball is in possession of the fullback on the far side. She receives possession in the wide channel, with the wide player driving inside to attract the opposition fullback and open the space for her to drive into after gathering possession from the centre-back.

Meanwhile, the four advanced German attackers all drive into the penalty box to be crossing options, while the defensive midfielders push forward and position themselves near the edge

of the penalty area to look to gather any second balls the opposition defenders are able to clear, which keeps the opposition defence pinned in and under pressure. This aggressive attacking movement off the ball has led to plenty of goals for Germany in recent matches, with opposition defences typically put under pressure for long spells in matches.

GERMANY BALL PROGRESSION

All International Matches - Oct. 2023 - Jun. 2024

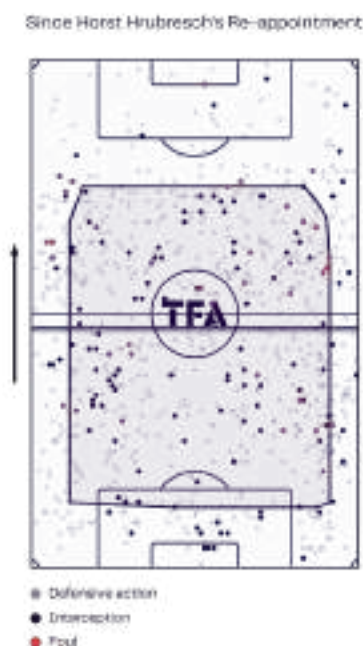


The data viz graphic above helps to give us a bit more insight into Germany's ball progression since the back half of last calendar year. We can see how most of Germany's progressive runs and attempted dribbles have occurred in the wide channels or half-spaces. They have tended to be more proficient when attacking down the left side, with most of their attacks coming down this flank. Germany will be a threat down the flanks for opposition defences. The numbers they push forward into attacking areas heaps constant pressure on opposition defences. It will be interesting to see how the United States, Zambia, and Australia look to counter this high-octane German attack.

DEFENSIVE PHASE

From a defensive standpoint, Germany look to be aggressive and on the front foot, with them tending to hold a very high defensive line and push their defensive line up past midfield at times when in possession. This tends to be a high-risk-high-reward defensive style of play, with the potential to be caught out in quick opposition transitional moments.

GERMANY DEFENSIVE TERRITORY

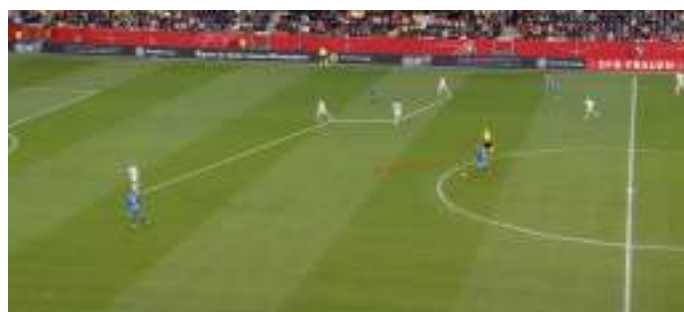


When looking at the data viz graphic shown above, we are able to see the average defensive territory of Germany since Horst Hrubesch's re-appointments as interim head coach in October of last year. The two horizontal lines near midfield represent the average height of Germany's defensive line, as well as the average area of engagement. A vast majority of their defensive actions also occur within the middle third or attacking third of the pitch, with winning the ball back in advanced positions a key part of Germany's defensive style of play.



The data showed that Germany tends to hold a very high defensive line when the ball is turned over in the attacking third. In the image above from this phase of play against Iceland, we can see how Germany looks to keep their defensive line high to put instant pressure on the opposition forwards when the ball is played forward.

In this specific phase of play, the ball is played from the midfielder, looking for a direct ball into the striker. However, the centre-back is tight to the forward due to the high defensive line, and this tight positioning does not allow the Iceland forward to have a clear opportunity to gain possession. As a result, the Germany centre-back is able to put the forward off, with the ball being shielded, allowing Germany to gather possession and restart play with the goalkeeper.



Due to Germany's insistence on fielding a high line, issues are destined to arrive at crucial moments in matches for Horst Hrubesch's side. This phase of play, again against Iceland, shows where the weaknesses lie in Germany's defensive approach. This German defensive phase starts in their attacking half, with possession being turned over for Iceland to recover. One of the German centre-backs steps out of the defensive line and into midfield, looking to anticipate a pass to an opposition midfielder.

However, the opposition are able to catch this player out, with a one-two being played with the Iceland forward, who does well playing back to goal. This allows the midfielder to receive and drive into plenty of space between the midfield and defensive lines of Germany, as we can see from the figure above. This time, the German defence is forced to drop in an attempt to get back into a defensive shape, but they are caught out, with Iceland able to overload the fullback at the back post with a 2v1. The ensuing cross is played towards this area with Iceland able to score.

While Germany have been a solid defensive side with this aggressive style of high-risk, high-reward defending, they can be played through, and elite sides, namely the United States in their Olympics group, will likely be able to punish any defensive errors.

TRANSITIONS

From a statistical perspective, Germany are not a side that look to play much in transition, as they tend to look to dominate proceedings. However, this is not to say they are not dangerous when they are able to win possession back in advanced areas, with the talent that they possess making them clinical in transitional moments.



When talking about the threat that Germany offers in transitional moments, the image above gives a bit of an idea of how dangerous they can be in these moments. In this phase of play above against Denmark, the ball is won back in the defensive half of the pitch by Germany, with the only thought to quickly play vertically.

The German forwards are quick to spring forward, with the two splitting and looking to make vertical runs that pull the opposition defence apart. Meanwhile, the midfielder in possession drives forward to the edge of the attacking half before looking to pick out the forward, making a run beyond the advanced Danish fullback on the near side, with Hrubesch's side still looking to attack the wide channels in transitional moments.



We can see above how this transitional phase for Germany ends. After winning possession and finding the forward making a run in the channel, the forward faces up the Danish fullback and looks to run at her. This forces the defender to get tucked inside, allowing the space for the German fullback to overlap beyond into the vacated space.

In the central area between the posts, three German players make runs into the penalty box, confusing the opposition defence. The furthest German player makes a run across goal and towards the near post area, while the closest player makes a back post run, with the final player making a slot run and sitting just above the penalty spot. Once the Danish defender is off balance, the ball is played into the path of the overlapping fullback, with the defender playing a cross towards the back post area for the attacker to head past the goalkeeper.

While they are not a side that looks to always play in transition, Germany are extremely dangerous in transitional moments, with this mainly down to the talent that they possess all over the squad, as well as the work rates they possess.

FORWARDS

When it comes to the forwards for Germany, their main task will be to score goals, and they all have been prolific at club level, especially this season. Alexandra Popp has scored nine goals in all competitions for Wolfsburg this season, while Lea Schüller managed 14 goals in all competitions for Bayern Munich this season. Laura Freigang is another forward likely to contribute to the German attack. Although she has scored 13 goals for Eintracht Frankfurt this season, there is a high probability she will be trying to do most of her damage coming off the bench.

All three have also attempted plenty of shots per match this season, with all three being near the top of the Frauen Bundesliga charts in this category. For more context, Popp leads the way with her 3.76 shots per 90 minutes, with Schüller being just behind with 3.75 shots per 90 minutes. Freigang ranks 10th on the list but still attempted 2.48 shots per 90 minutes last season. All three are also very good at attempting shots aerially, with all three ranking in the top five for headed shots in last season's Frauen Bundesliga (Popp 14, Schüller 12, Freigang 8).

MIDFIELDERS

When talking about the midfielders for Germany, their ability to progress the ball vertically, as well as the defensive capabilities of the defensive midfielders in particular, will both be important for Germany as they go for another Olympic gold medal this summer. Starting with ball progression, Lena Oberdorf has been essential to progressing play forward for Wolfsburg this season, and this is justified by her 10.39 passes to the final third per 90 minutes last season, one of the highest totals in the Frauen Bundesliga. Oberdorf has also been impactful from a defensive perspective this season, with the

Wolfsburg midfielder averaging 9.92 defensive duels per 90 minutes. For Chelsea in the WSL, Sjoeke Nüsken averaged 5.56 passes to the final third per 90 minutes while also averaging 5.42 defensive duels per 90 minutes.

The more advanced midfielders will offer more of an impact with their ability to provide assists closer to goal, and both likely starters have had decent seasons when it comes to providing goalscoring chances for teammates. Bühl led the FrauenBundesliga this season with nine assists, while Jule Brand only had two assists, but her impact came with her ability to get on the ball in the penalty area. The 21-year-old had the most touches in the penalty area per 90 minutes in Germany with 57, while her 6.5 touches per 90 minutes was the second highest.

DEFENDERS

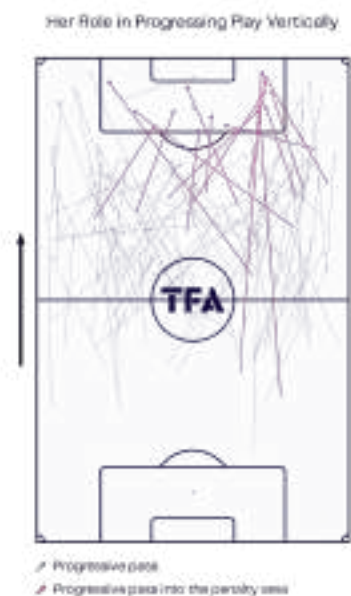
With how aggressively Germany like to play defensively, the defenders for Hrubesch's side will need to be at their highest level from a defensive standpoint this summer if they are to have any chance at taking home the goal medal. Giulia Gwinn has averaged 9.27 defensive duels per 90 minutes for Bayern Munich this season, with the fullback on the opposite side, Sarai Linder, averaging 5.95 defensive duels per 90 minutes. In the central areas, Hendrich and Doorsoun have shown their ability in defensive duels this season, with Hendrich averaging 7.51 defensive duels per 90 minutes and Doorsoun slightly less at 5.29 defensive duels per 90 minutes.

KEY PLAYER

When looking at this German squad, it is hard to pick one player who could be considered key, as all of them have the capability, but it is hard to look past Lena Oberdorf. The 22-year-old Wolfsburg midfielder has been immense for the German side in recent seasons and will be

joining Bayern Munich this summer. Oberdorf is an all-action midfielder, looking to dictate play from deeper areas in the midfield and being heavily involved in the defensive side of the game. She also pops up in attacking areas, with five goals and three assists for Wolfsburg in the Frauen-Bundesliga for the 2023/24 season.

L. OBERDORF PROGRESSIVE PASSES



We touched briefly on this earlier, but we can see from the graphic above how impactful Oberdorf looks to be from deeper-lying positions in midfield. The data viz above shows her progressive pass map, which shows us how a good amount of her progressive passes have come from inside the defensive half or just inside the attacking half, highlighting her tendency to play more as a deep-lying playmaker at club level for Wolfsburg.

She will likely be tasked with being a deep-lying playmaker for Germany at the Olympic Games this summer, and her ability to play as a box-to-box midfielder will also benefit how Germany will want to set up. Oberdorf has shown on the brightest stages before, and this will be another time for her to showcase her talents to the world before joining Bayern Munich this summer and embarking on the next step of her club career.

TOURNAMENT PREDICTION

Looking at the group they have been drawn into for this tournament, it looks to be a straight shot between Germany and the United States to see who will win the group and who will finish second and advance to the knockout stages. Germany should go far in this tournament based on the quality of their squad, but the same thing was said last summer before they went out in the group stages of the World Cup.

2024 OLYMPICS GROUP B

CORTNEE VINE



AUSTRALIA

AUSTRALIA

ALEXANDRA HUNT

Following joint-hosting the Women's World Cup in 2023, Australia will head to Paris this summer to see if they can improve on their fourth-place finish at the previous Olympics held in Tokyo. The Matildas booked their place at their fifth Olympic games following a comprehensive 13-0 aggregate win over Uzbekistan in February.

Despite the convincing victory in the qualifiers, Australia must contend with a difficult Group B at the games, up against the USA—who beat the Matildas in the bronze medal match in Tokyo—Germany, and Zambia. Tony Gustavsson's side will further have to negotiate the tournament without their usual captain and key player, Sam Kerr, who suffered an ACL injury earlier in the season.

Although there are potential hurdles on route to gold, Australia Women are a footballing nation on the up at present, making steady progress in tournament football. The Aussies will be keen to show there is more to this team than purely being reliant on the talent of Kerr.

In this tactical analysis and scout report, we will take a look at the Matildas' chances in Paris 2024. We will assess Australia's tactics both in and out of possession as well as provide an analysis of the playing personnel at Gustavsson's disposal.

PREDICTED STARTING XI



Australia hasn't had too much game time leading up to Paris but has contested a few friendlies against Mexico and China since confirming qualification. Gustavsson's side has been known to make in-game tweaks tactically but you would expect them to utilise the 4-4-2 formation this summer.

Australia was the first nation to announce their 18-woman squad for the games, which includes many recognisable figures currently plying their trade in the Women's Super League. One such player is West Ham's experienced goalkeeper Mackenzie Arnold, who you would expect to get the nod in goal ahead of Liverpool's Teagan Micah.

Arnold is one of a handful of players in this squad on the verge of becoming three-time Olympians. Others include captain and Arsenal defender

Steph Catley, who is expected to start at left-back, and Lyon's Ellie Carpenter, the first choice at right-back.

There is a debate as to who will start in central defence, given the injury issues in this campaign. Still, we anticipate that Manchester City's Alanna Kennedy and PSG's Clare Hunt will be the preferred pairing. The most capped player in this squad, 35-year-old Clare Polkinghorne, is expected to provide cover for this position.

Arsenal's Kyra Cooney-Cross and West Ham's Katrina Gorry are likely to make the starting XI in central midfield. This is despite Cooney-Cross not being a regular starter in North London this season; prior to the squad announcement, there had been question marks concerning Gorry's fitness due to a prior injury.

The midfield lineup is completed by Real Madrid's Hayley Raso and Manchester City's Mary Fowler. However, it could be conceivable that Fowler will interchange positioning with Arsenal forward Caitlin Foord, who is expected to lead the line alongside the Aussie's only out-and-out striker, Michelle Heyman.

If one word epitomises this Australia squad, though, it is versatility. In addition to Fowler and Foord's ability to alternate positions between the central and wide areas, Kaitlyn Torpey is expected to provide cover both in the midfield and at right full-back; vice-captain Emily van Egmond is an alternative option either upfront or in midfield.

Moreover, Gustavsson has experimented with Catley in central defence rather than left-back, and likely substitute Tameka Yallop has taken up numerous different positions. Such flexibility ensures the Matildas could be a tactical headache for opponents.

We have already discussed the experienced personnel in this squad. As shown in the plot below, nearly half the Matildas are at least 30 years old.



Whilst this does point to a slightly ageing side, young players such as Cooney-Cross and Fowler are still breaking through the Aussie ranks, and they already have tournament football experience. Australia, therefore, has the makings of a fairly balanced squad.

ATTACKING PHASE

Gustavsson encourages his side to be brave in possession and look to play out from tight positions. The Aussies averaged 73% possession throughout their qualifying matches, which highlights the level of dominance they were able to assert.

However, don't expect the Matildas to be able to sustain such high percentages of play at the Olympics due to the higher level of opposition they will face—notably two teams ranked in the top five in the world. This is a stark contrast to the qualifiers, where their average opposition ranking was 48th in the world.

Nevertheless, Australia has produced some encouraging displays of late against the likes of China and Mexico, the former being ranked in the top 20 in the world. In the build-up to the

games, Australia has showcased their offensive strategy looking to hem the opposition within their own half.

The Matildas use their versatility in personnel to their advantage, pushing their full-backs high up and dropping a central midfielder, typically Cooney-Cross to form a back three.



Alternatively, Catley will sit deeper to form a back three with Kennedy and Hunt, allowing Carpenter on the right to be more offensive. Carpenter's positioning, though, is not solely restricted to the right-hand channel and providing overlapping runs. It also extends within the central spaces to create midfield overloads and within the half-spaces, rotating positioning with Raso on the right wing.



The above still shows Carpenter taking up a central midfield position, which has drawn the opposition in. This, in turn, has created space on the right for Raso to occupy and further stretched out the opposition's backline, which proceeded to close down Raso.

When Carpenter can get in possession in the half-spaces she is a big attacking threat for Australia.



Carpenter does a pre-check and, upon receiving the pass, takes advantage of the opening by quickly turning to drive forward at pace to provide a dangerous cross into the area. Australia's quick change in play can be expected at these games as they are often patient in their build-up and look to capitalise given the right opportunity.

Expect the Matildas to drill crosses into the area this summer as they look to pile their strikers and midfielders forward, using their player overloads to their advantage in the attacking phase.

With the likes of Fowler and Foord, Australia has some quality up top and players who are capable of producing moments of magic, but a critique of this squad is that they do not often produce the clear-cut chances that align with their possessional dominance.

The Matildas need to be more clinical, having only seen 39% of their shots on target during Olympic qualifying. Against better opposition, it will be even more critical for Gustavsson's side to make the most of their chances.

DEFENSIVE PHASE

Australia's offensive strategy transcends without possession, as they opt for a high press, while the opposition looks to build up play. The Aussies will often stick to their 4-4-2 shape in the defensive phase but will commit midfielders higher up toward the front two to assist in the press.

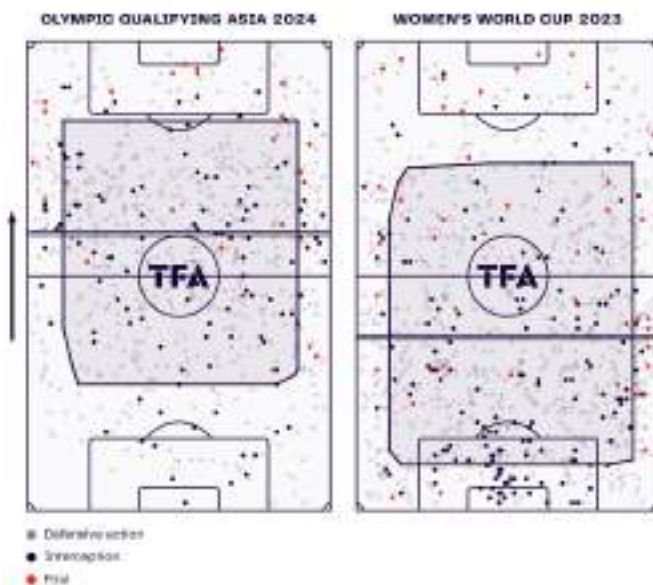
In the recent encounter against China, it is shown here how they looked to harry their opponents in and around the penalty area, giving little time on the ball.



The two forwards instigate the press; van Egmond also follows suit, wasting no time man-marking the central midfield passing option. The off-the-ball movements ensure the pass is made to the right, and Fowler closes down, further limiting China's passing options. China subsequently opt for the long ball and are unable to stamp down any possessional authority.

Australia's tactics to assert dominance out of possession worked well during qualifying, as they did not concede a single goal en route to Paris. The graphic below shows the Matildas' exceptionally high line from the qualifying stages.

AUSTRALIA DEFENSIVE TERRITORY



It is noticeable that, in comparison, Australia kept a much deeper defensive line at the last World Cup. Whilst Gustavsson's side has been much more adventurous lately, this is likely, in part, due to the level of the opposition during Olympic qualifying. Much like the decrease in average possession is anticipated from the Aussies in Paris, except for them to also play deeper than the recent norm, given the quality of their group opponents.

Australia's press is likely to be of less intensity when facing higher-quality opponents if you consider that in the two qualifying matches against Uzbekistan, Australia averaged a PPDA value of five, compared to 15.76 in a recent friendly against Canada, a side ranked in the worlds top 10.

If the opposition can bypass the Australia pass, there could be space to exploit in their backline; the high defensive line could leave Australia vulnerable to long balls, looking to test the pace of the two centre-backs. Australia will look to stick to their pressing principles in Paris, but realistically, you would expect the intensity to be dialled down.

When the opposition can build out from their own third, Carpenter is expected to be of equal

importance as she is to Australia's attacking play. The right-back is likely to be given the most license out of the back four to be more aggressive in closing down the opposition and instigating putting Australia back on the front foot.

TRANSITIONS

As Australia has dominated possession overall of late, they are not a side that has become particularly synonymous with counterattacking football. That being said, there is pace in this forward line and from the options down the channels.

The pace in the Australia lineup extends beyond the predicted starting XI, though, if you consider the likes of Cortnee Vine, who could be a useful attacking option from the bench this summer as her speed could be a positive outlet, particularly if the Matildas have a lead to protect.

However, due to Australia's willingness to opt for overloads in the attacking phases, it could be vulnerable in defensive transitions.



You only have to go back to the last World Cup, where Sweden exploited Australia's exposed backline, scoring on the break. As Catley and Carpenter are expected to be on the offensive, this leaves potential space on the channels for opponents to manipulate and stretch the centre-back pairing, which was the case above.



This was a similar scenario against Uzbekistan in qualifying, as space opened up on the attacking left-hand side. Australia was fortunate, though, in that the forward pass on the counter was poorly placed, but they may not have been so fortuitous against stronger opposition such as the USA or Germany.

Whilst there are positives to this Australia squad, given the versatility of their players, astute tactical positioning will be critical for the Matildas this summer as a weakness in their defensive transitions is their somewhat chaotic approach to covering their tracks.

FORWARDS

With Kerr sustaining an injury earlier in the campaign, the door opened up to Canberra United's veteran forward, Heyman, to stake a place in the Aussie fold. It is an opportunity she has grasped, netting five times during Olympic qualifying despite a 2.5 expected goal value.

All of the goals dispatched by Heyman have been inside the penalty area, notably in and around the six-yard box. The 35-year-old will look to showcase her poaching ability in front of goal, anticipating incoming crosses from the flanks.

In contrast to Heyman, Foord is likely to operate across the front line and, as we've previously alluded to, will alternate positioning with Fowler on the left wing. Despite injury struggles this season, Foord will be looked upon as an experienced player of this squad and will look to add a clinical touch.

From the bench, Australia is likely to opt for Vine to change up the pace of their attacking outlet; van Egmond will likely be an assured figure they could rely on.

MIDFIELDERS

Raso may not have been a consistent starter in her debut season at Real Madrid, but she has become an important figure within this Australia fold, chipping in with goals and being a prominent figure on the right-hand side.

In comparison to her positional peers from the women's top nine divisions, Raso ranked in the 99th percentile for tackles per 90 this last calendar year. Her defensive solidarity will be important to Gustavsson's side, given Carpenter's ever-changing positioning.

A concern of this midfield setup, though, is the lack of playing time domestically. Raso, Fowler, and Cooney-Cross have not been regular starters at their respective clubs; Gorry suffered an ankle injury this campaign and was a doubt to make this squad.

However, it has been noted that despite the lack of consistent game time, this midfield has performed to a high level when in the Aussie gold, as they have often been given the opportunity to express themselves.

DEFENDERS

Given the nature of Australia's play throughout qualifying, it is important that the defensive personnel are comfortable in possession. In both Kennedy and Hunt, the Aussies have two centre-backs who are comfortable at dictating play and are known for advancing play toward the opposition half. However, neither can afford to be complacent when in possession.

This is especially true given that Carpenter and Catley are likely to push higher up. However, Catley can also provide cover in the centre of defence, and such versatility is likely to see the Australia backline transition from a back four to a back three throughout the tournament.

Including Arnold in goal, the defensive line comprises some of this squad's more experienced players, and they will be crucial figures in ensuring Australia stays level-headed. Carpenter, particularly, will need to be disciplined in defensive positioning and pick the moments to press intensely and wisely.

KEY PLAYER

There are some experienced, quality players in this Australia squad, and we have already touched upon the tactical importance of players such as Carpenter. However, one player who we believe will be key to Australia's medal hopes in Paris is midfielder Cooney-Cross.

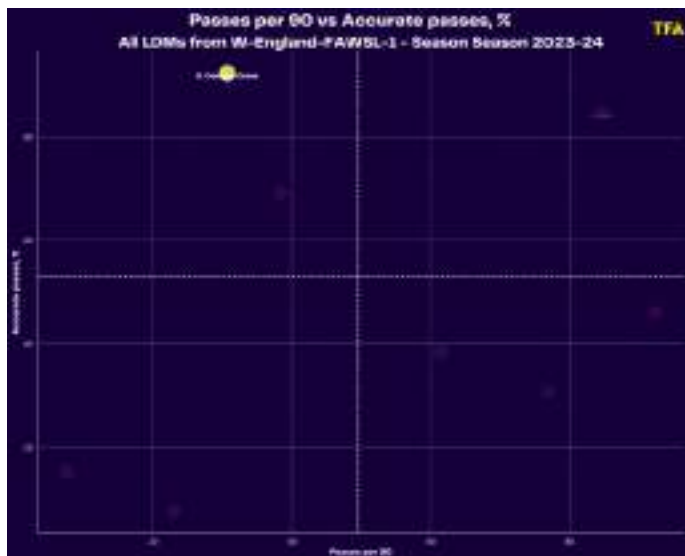
Cooney-Cross will be the key pivot in the midfield four, who will be hugely influential to Australia both in and out of possession. The 22-year-old will be expected to provide defensive cover for the advanced full-backs, so will need to be disciplined in positional play.

The Arsenal midfielder's quality in possession will be key in driving the Matildas forward, as she is an assured figure when dribbling. Cooney-Cross ranks just outside the top 10 for the percentage of successful take-ons in this season's WSL.



Notably, from the above graphic, Cooney-Cross will look to drive into the box to create openings for her team, which could be useful if she is trying to break down a low block.

A further strength of Cooney-Cross' is her passing, which is exemplified by the scatter plot.



Although the 22-year-old doesn't rank highly for passes per 90, compared to her positional peers in the WSL this season, Cooney-Cross ranks highly for her passing accuracy. This points to a player capable of dictating the narrative of play as well as a crucial figure in retaining possession – something Australia will need when contending with the heavyweights of their Olympic group.

TOURNAMENT PREDICTION

Undoubtedly, it will be a tough task for Australia to qualify from Group B, with the USA and Germany considered favourites and relatively tough competition from Zambia to boot. They may end up banking on being one of the best third-placed sides; however, no football tournament is complete without a shock or two. The Matildas certainly have it within them to cause an upset and progress to the knockout stages in Paris. If they can do so, it may prove a tall order to bring Gold back to the Gold Coast, but there could be every chance of going one step further from Tokyo and finding a place on the podium.

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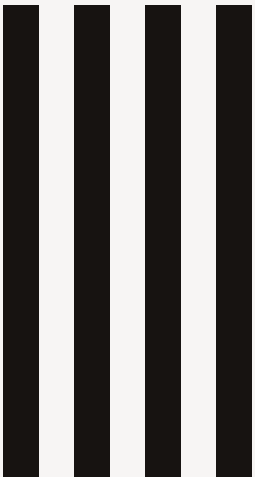
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TOTAL FOOTBALL ANALYSIS

2024 OLYMPICS

GROUP

SPAIN
JAPAN
NIGERIA
BRAZIL



2024 OLYMPICS GROUP C

ALEXIA PUTELLAS



SPAIN

SPAIN

SELIM BEN HMIDA // @MRZIGUEN

Spain Women will be participating in the Women's football tournament of the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris as current World Cup Champions, and therefore, the target will obviously be winning the gold medal. Following numerous convincing performances on big occasions crowned by a World Cup success story, the time has come for Spain to battle for the Olympics and make their first-ever participation in this tournament a remarkable one.

This competition comes at the perfect time for Spain as they failed to qualify for it before. Now, they enter as World Cup champions and UEFA Women's Nations League champions. In fact, Spain were capable of leading Group A4, which consisted of tough teams like Sweden, Italy and Switzerland. Afterwards, they had to play the Netherlands in the semi-finals and beat them in order to get their ticket to the 2024 Summer Olympics, knowing that the top three teams of the UEFA Women's Nations League are the ones who qualify for this Olympic tournament.

The idea is to build on this success and continue the successful journey of titles by performing well in Group C with Nigeria, Japan and Brazil and top this group to see what they can achieve when passing to the knockout stage. Although this group might look "okay" for Spain, avoiding underestimation will be very important as all of these three teams can disturb Spain and eventually win points against them, especially if Spain falls into the trap of underestimation.

If things go well for Spain in this group stage, teams like the USWNT, Germany, France, and Canada will be able to knock Spain out of the tournament. Therefore, Spain will have to prepare well for this competition as, unlike many other participating teams, they don't have Olympic experience. Also, paying extra attention to details and to opponents' characteristics will be vital to surpassing the needed obstacles during the tournament, and

that will mainly be Montserrat Tomé and her staff's role.

PREDICTED STARTING XI



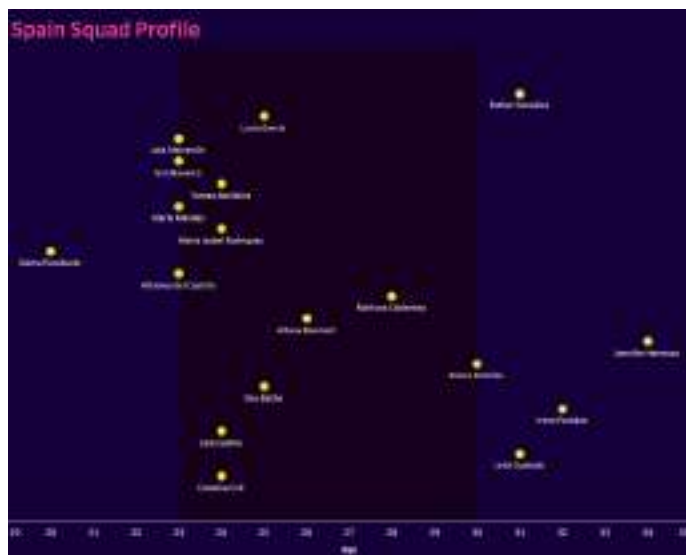
Montserrat Tomé will most probably be using the 4-3-3 formation during the Summer Olympics since it has been the formation that Spain used the most during the latest big tournaments. Although there was a change of head coach in the meantime, it is important to note that Spain won the latest edition of the World Cup using the 4-3-3 formation under the management of Jorge Vilda. It is also true that Tomé has been trying different formations during the recent period, such as the 4-1-4-1, the 3-5-2, and the 4-2-3-1.

Tomé will most probably opt for Cata Coll as a first-choice goalkeeper since she is the first-choice goalkeeper for both Spain and Barcelona Women and has an advantage over Real Madrid's Misa Rodríguez. Taking into account

Olga Carmona's injury, Tomé will have to use Manchester City's Leila Ouahabi as a left-back, Laia Codina and Irene Paredes as centre-backs, and Ona Battle as a right-back if she recovers quickly from her injury.

In midfield, things are relatively simple for Tomé since the team has some of the best midfielders in the world at the moment. She will most likely be using Alexia Putellas as a defensive midfielder and Aitana Bonmatí and Jenni Hermoso as central midfielders, precisely like the team was playing during the World Cup. That being said, a few alternations can happen during the tournament, as someone like Teresa Abelleira can replace Putellas effectively whenever needed.

The attacking three will most likely be Mariona Caldentey as a left winger, Athenea del Castillo on the right-wing and Salma Paralluelo as a striker. Changes can also be made to this attacking three line-up as names like Esther González, Lucía García and Eva Navarro can represent key second-half weapons for Tomé.



In terms of the players' average age in this squad, we can argue that Spain's team for the Summer Olympics looks rejuvenated with numerous players who are about to reach their peak years, such as Salma Paralluelo, del Castillo, María Méndez, Eva Navarro and Laia Aleixandri.

At the same time, the team does not lack experience, as names like Putallas, Ouahabi, Caldentey, and Aitana Bonmatí can help a lot in dealing with complex situations during games and in helping the younger players gain more confidence and play with more ease.

Even the players who are "past their peak years," as the graphic shows, and who are mainly Irene Paredes and Jenni Hermoso, are still in very good physical shape. They are capable of giving 150% and playing 90 minutes. Therefore, age will not represent a problem for this Spanish team, especially if they get lucky enough and are not subject to injuries.

ATTACKING PHASE

When it comes to Spain's attacking phase, it should be said that Spain has one of the most dangerous attacks in this tournament and is capable of punishing any defence. The reasons for this powerful attacking phase lie mainly in the team's ability to attack with numerous quality players and in the midfielders' world-class attacking and playmaking talents, which help them build up with high success rates and reach the final third quite easily.

The addition of Putellas, Bonmatí, and Hermoso should never be undermined or overlooked, as these players are central to most, if not all, of Spain's attacks. Whether with key passes, penetrations, or shots from distance, all three players proved on numerous occasions that they can be very dangerous as soon as they get close to the penalty box.

It is enough to mention that the team's overall passing accuracy equals 86.7% to understand how effective these players can be in terms of playmaking and building-up from the back. Moreover, with 79.2% of passes towards the final third accuracy rate, we can say that Spain does not have chance creation issues at all

and are capable of staying for a long time in their opponent's final third, which makes their probability of scoring goals higher.

The following example highlights the addition of Spain's midfield players and their efficiency inside the box, as all of them tend to participate actively in attack and know exactly when and how to move without the ball to provide passing options and eventually finish actions, too. This goal against Switzerland shows how Paralluelo and Putellas exchanged roles as Paralluelo penetrated with the ball toward the left side of the box, and Putellas came from behind and positioned herself in the centre of the box to be able to receive a pass from Paralluelo and finish the action inside the net.

These movements and automatic roles changes inside the final third make Spain's attacking plans hard to predict. They always tend to diversify their actions while focusing mainly on quick, short passes between the lines and moving intelligently without the ball.



Finishing does not represent an issue for Spain either, as they actually have some very talented players up front. Caldentey who has remarkable pace, dribbling skills and shooting precision; Paralluelo who has been excellent in terms of finishing since the latest World Cup, during which she scored the title-winning goal, and del Castillo, who can create a lot of problems for her markers on the right-wing, Spain are expected to overcome the defences that they will encounter as they have plenty of attacking solutions.

This example of a goal against Italy highlights del Castillo's raw talent and her ability to overcome markers in one-on-one situations and still find the necessary balance to shoot and score, which makes her a very dangerous player on the right-wing.



Moreover, Spain are powerful enough in terms of set-pieces and have been scoring a lot of goals from corners lately, as most of their players are good enough in the air. Spain also know how to exploit spaces left by defenders, as they know how to attack these spaces with key passes and quick movements from midfielders/attacking players. In this regard, Hermoso represents a "joker-like" player in this team as she is a striker who is employed as a midfielder.

This means that Hermoso plays in midfield and provides key passes but suddenly advances to act like a second striker or a proper striker during some actions. This goal action highlights her ability to still play as a striker and move extremely well without the ball to meet her teammate's pass in the space left by the opposing defence.



Spain do have a lot of options upfront but must not underestimate their opposing defences and make sure to vary their attacks even further

during this tournament as their mission will surely be more complicated as they are actually “the team to beat”. As World Cup champions, all opponents will be preparing extensively to find ways of stopping Spain’s attacks by studying them thoroughly.

DEFENSIVE PHASE

Regarding their defensive phase, it is fair to argue that Spain can be considered among the best teams from a defensive perspective, as they have a very compact and disciplined defensive line. They concede 0.8 goals per game on average and concede about 5.2 goals per match.

With experienced defenders who have been playing together for a while, such as Irene Paredes and Laia Codina, and the support of the two full-backs Ouahabi and Battle, Spain are expected to perform well in defence. Nevertheless, a lot more work will be needed when facing Brazil, Japan and Nigeria as the three teams are actually having potentially dangerous attacking players such as Asisat Oshoala and Uchenna Kanu for Nigeria, Maika Hamano and Hinata Miyazawa for Japan and Marta, Ludmila, and Jaqueline for Brazil.

Paying extra attention when facing a team like Japan will be essential as Spain have already played against this team recently and precisely during the latest World Cup when Japan succeeded in beating Spain 4-0. Therefore, Spain’s players surely remember this encounter and will need to know how to approach such a game in order to be able to “take revenge” without falling into the trap of precipitation or excessive aggressivity.

The following conceded goal against Japan exposes Spain’s weaknesses in defence and how they can leave gaps at the back of their defensive line, especially knowing that they

often use a high defensive line and engage their defenders in the build-up in an advanced way.

When facing teams with very pacey players such as Japan, Spain will need to be more attentive and avoid keeping a high defensive line to be less exposed to counterattacking risks as such teams rely mainly on counterattacks and know how to exploit them perfectly like they did in this goal action.



The same issue happened multiple times and against different opponents during the last period, and that’s why Tomé will need to address this problem quickly to avoid letting opponents exploit it during the Olympics. Moreover, planning the full-backs’ attacking movements and finding ways to cover for them when they advance is necessary, as failure to do so automatically leads to leaving a lot of space for opponents.

This example against Switzerland shows how Spain’s issues mostly occur due to their high defensive block but also because their full-backs sometimes fail to retreat in time to mark their opponents, which leads to disasters like it did in this conceded goal action.



It is true that Spanish players are excellent at passing, can play well under high pressing, and usually do not get affected when opponents disturb them in their own half. However, avoiding overconfidence will be needed in such a big tournament, as overconfidence might lead to errors in terms of passing or ball protection, for instance.

The goalkeeper, defenders and midfielders will need to avoid complicated passing solutions in defence and try not to overcomplicate things for themselves as the goalkeeper did in this action against Italy when she tried to provide a pass towards a marked centre-back when being under pressure and failed to provide an accurate one instead of opting for a clearance or a pass towards the flanks. It is true that taking risks is needed in some situations, yet in others, like this one, it is completely unnecessary.



TRANSITIONS

For attacking transitions, Spain can be considered one of the best regarding this aspect as they are quick and talented enough to create issues for any defence as soon as they launch counterattacks. They tend to advance using one of the midfielders, while one or two full-backs advance as high as possible in the opponent's half. Afterwards, midfielders either pass to the striker, who drops back to receive the ball or asks for it in space or to wingers, who also free themselves from marking to receive the ball.

Like in the following example, Spain tend to use overlaps of full-backs in a remarkable and extensive way during their attacking transitions in order to find dangerous crossing trajectories inside the box and get rid of marking on the wings.



Spain will need to address defensive transitions because failing to do so might lead to serious issues in the long run. The team often fails to retreat quickly due to the high defensive block and the consequences of attacking with a lot of players.

Spain often find themselves in disadvantageous situations during these actions as they are not able to retreat with numbers instantly due to the mentioned reasons. That's why it will be essential to apply tactical changes in this regard to limit conceding disastrous counterattacks.



FORWARDS

Spain has numerous key choices upfront as they are known for having some of the best players in their positions, such as Caldentey, Del Castillo, who is a player to watch during this tournament, and Paralluelo, who is participating

to confirm that what happened during the World Cup was not just a coincidence but a glimpse of what Paralluelo is capable of doing for Spain.

The team's "backup" choices should not be overlooked either, as these names are starters in their respective teams. The experience and the finishing traits of Esther González will be needed, especially during delicate moments, as she has more experience as a striker than Paralluelo and can replace her effectively whenever needed.

Almost the same applies to Lucía García and Eva Navarro, who are essential for Manchester United and Atlético Madrid and can add a lot to the team's attack when things don't go well or when the team needs fresh and dynamic players in second halves.

MIDFIELDERS

When it comes to midfielders, it is fair to say that Spain has the best midfield in the tournament. Two Ballon d'Or winners, Putellas and Bonmatí, are not only complementary but also effective in terms of attacking, playmaking, and defending. With one of Hermoso or Abelleira (depending on the game and the opponent), Spain guarantees more balance in midfield and adds more attacking additions, especially with Hermoso.

The only thing that Tomé will probably need to work on regarding this midfield is how and when to cover for their teammates in defence and how to be more crucial in the defensive phase to help in conceding fewer goals per game.

DEFENDERS

This area represents the most "problematic" aspect that Tomé needs to improve even though the team have world-class defenders like Paredes and Codina. However, the defensive tactics need to be altered to take fewer risks in defence and preserve the team's balance.

Carmona's injury will not necessarily be an issue for Tomé as Ouahabi can replace her in the best of ways, even though she does not have the same attacking attributes as Carmona. But in case of other injuries, Spain might be facing serious problems as they are not allowed to have the sufficient number of substitutes to be able to have a replacement for each position. Therefore, it is expected to see players used out of position in this tournament in case of injuries.

KEY PLAYER

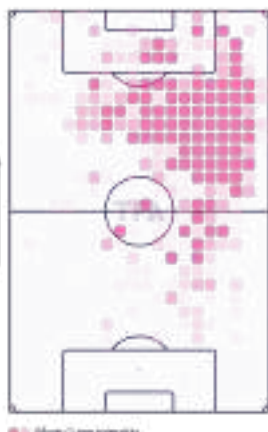
The Ballon d'Or and The Best FIFA Women's Player Award winner, Bonmatí, does not really need a presentation as her records speak for themselves. She is actually one of the best midfielders in Women's football, as she has all the traits needed to be a very useful midfielder to any team.

With a passing accuracy rate reaching 88.2% and an ability to win 18.92 duels per game (47.6% on average) and 1.45 aerial duels (52.3% on average), she is surely going to help Spain a lot and be their key player, not only during the Olympics but also in the upcoming continental and international tournaments as well since she is 26-years-old at the moment.

The following heatmap shows the areas that Bonmatí covers and how she tends to advance a lot with intelligence while not forgetting her defensive roles. Bonmatí's intelligent attacking movements and her ability to always position herself in key areas to propose passing solutions make her more dangerous upfront, as she also knows exactly what to do when she gets the ball in the final third.

AITANA BONMATI HEATMAP

All games from Supercopa Femenina 2023/2024, Copa de la Reina 2023/2024, UEFA Women's Nations League - League A 2023/2024, UEFA Women's Champions League 2023/2024, FIFA Women's World Cup 2023 Australia/New Zealand



Her quick key passes between the lines usually make the difference for Spain as she also has excellent chemistry with her midfield and attacking teammates, which makes things easier and more natural for everyone.

In terms of goalscoring, Bonmatí scores 0.47 goals per game as she shoots 2.61 times per match. These numbers do not look bad for a midfielder, especially when knowing that Bonmatí often scores without needing to shoot a lot on goal beforehand. In other words, one or two shots per match are usually sufficient for Bonmatí to make the difference and score. Nevertheless, encouraging her to opt for shooting from distance more often might be fruitful in the long run as well.

TOURNAMENT PREDICTION

As World Cup champions, it is obviously expected from Spain to finish at the top of their group and win the golden medal. However, past experiences have shown that World Cup champions do not necessarily win the tournaments that come just after the World Cup. That's why Spain will have to work a lot on the mental level to not fall into the trap of overconfidence and to keep working hard to achieve their target without listening to anyone else's thoughts on Spain's chances.

In terms of prediction, Spain will most probably qualify from Group C at the top of their group and will, therefore, be facing the 3rd of Group A or B. This would give them the advantage to win in the quarter-finals even though the 3rd of Group A or B might be a tough team. Then, if things go well for Spain and they perform at their best, they can win both in the semi-finals and in the final.

2024 OLYMPICS GROUP C

SAKI KUMAGAI



JAPAN

JAPAN

JACK MANSHIP // @JMANSHIP19

Although not among the favourites for this competition, Japan goes into the Olympics in good form, having tasted various levels of success in 2023 and 24. Nadeshiko Japan, currently managed by Futoshi Ikeda, beat Korean DPR in the final to win the 2023 Asian Games, and they came close to more silverware when it came to the World Cup and the SheBelieves Cup—finishing fourth in the latter and getting knocked out at the quarter-finals in the former.

They qualified for this tournament by winning Asia's qualifying competition, beating Korean DPR over two legs in the final. Since the SheBelieves Cup, Japan has played two friendlies, beating New Zealand comfortably both times. They are also scheduled to play Ghana in a friendly match in July as they continue their Olympics preparation.

This analysis provides a tactical preview of Japan's tactics in the past year—the key elements of their strong attacking game, the tactics behind their defensive approach, their work in transitions, and various squad selection angles.

PREDICTED STARTING XI



Japan have opted for a 5-4-1 more often than not in the past year, but their approach is less defensive than the formation sounds! As we will explain later in the analysis, a well-balanced system allows their full-backs to push forward in possession to provide width to the narrow midfield four, which is set to be full of big names Manchester United's Hinata Miyazawa, Manchester City's Yui Hasegawa, Bezeza's Aoba Fujino, and Liverpool's Fuka Nagano.

Japan can switch the formation to 4-1-4-1, allowing them to keep the same attacking lineup in midfield. Mina Tanaka will lead the front line in either formation.

At the back, Saki Kumagai is a likely starter in the heart of the defence, alongside Hana Takahashi and Moeka Minami – Hitaru Kitagawa and Risa Shimizu are set to start in those full/wing-back roles.

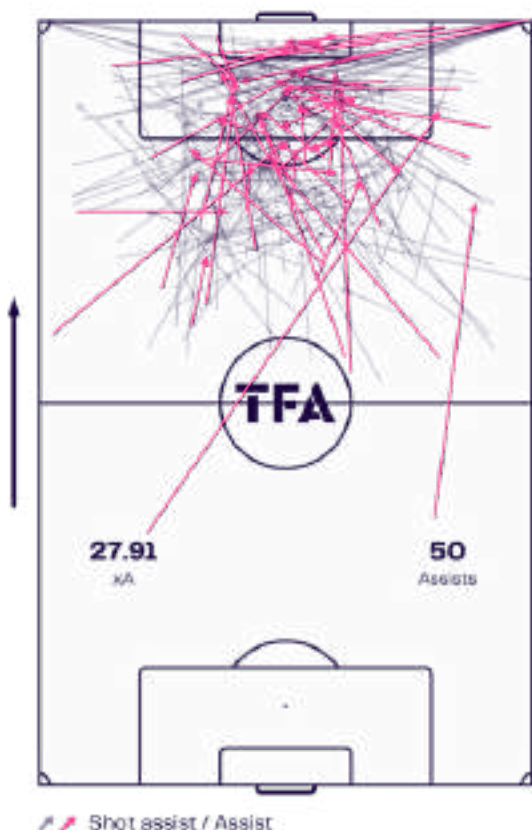


In terms of the age profile, the Japan squad primarily consists of players in and around their prime years, with just two players aged 30+ being involved. On the flip side, four U23 players have been included in the squad, including 18-year-old Tōko Koga. Various WSL starts feature in the squad, with many in the prime stages of their respective careers.

ATTACKING PHASE

JAPAN SHOT ASSISTS

From 18 June 2023 to 18 June 2024



In the past year, Japan have had some good form in front of goal, scoring 3.7 goals per 90. Many of those goals and various other chances originated from build-up play in central areas, as you can see from the visual above. Another noteworthy element of their chance creation is the strength of their right-flank attack, where they tend to create/assist on a more regular basis than they do on the left-flank.

They are a dangerous team in the final third, a team that plays with confidence and precision. In the past year, Japan has averaged 16.3 shots per 90 minutes, with an impressive accuracy rate of 46.9%.



While Japan don't tend to dominate every game in terms of possession, their in-possession approach shows clever positional details that allow them to assert dominance in select areas of the pitch.

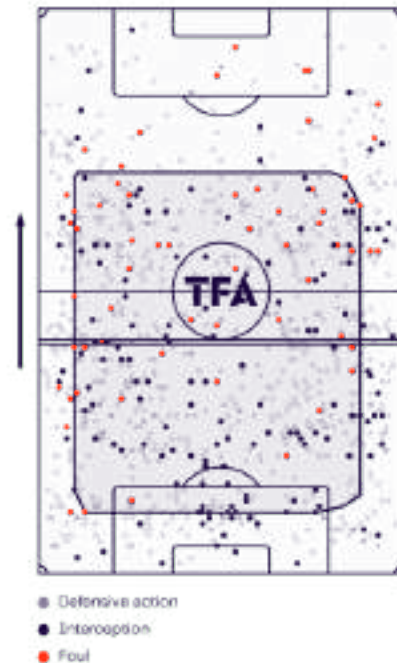
The full-backs are often seen to be high and wide in possession, with the wide midfielders tucking inside. Japan's shape in this regard is interesting; there is plenty of freedom and fluidity between the midfield four, where they eventually look for clever off-the-ball movements and passing combinations. There is also an element of strong chemistry and link-up play between the full-back and wide midfielder, particularly on that right flank.

The left centre-back and right centre-back stay alongside the middle centre-back instead of pushing into higher/wider positions, which lends itself to defending in transitions.

DEFENSIVE PHASE

JAPAN DEFENSIVE TERRITORY

From 18 June 2023 to 18 June 2024



A critical element of their in-possession approach is the use of progressive passes – in the last year, they've averaged 87.35 prog passes per 90, with a tremendous accuracy of 71.5%. The application of this pass type again uses elements of that central focus in attack, as seen before, where they look to take advantage of the numbers game and any empty space.

On some occasions, like in the example above, they use those moments in the middle to move the ball out to the opposite flank. The speed of that build-up segment (progressive pass into the middle) means they can bypass the opposition and shift the ball into dangerous space.

Japan tend to be fairly well-balanced in their defensive approach – they don't sit back but they're also not an all-out pressing machine. As you may guess, the bulk of their defensive work (in their own half) happens in central areas.

In the opposition half, they are more active in wide areas, especially in breaking up play. As the map above does show, they are less active in the final third in terms of shutting the opposition down. Their PPDA over the last year averages at 10 per game – while this is usually a sign of high aggression, Japan tend to save that higher intensity for games in which they are the much stronger team.

Overall, their defensive record in the past year has been fairly decent, conceding 0.85 goals per 90, facing just 6.95 shots per 90.



This is an example of said caution in their off-the-ball approach. The midfield unit will often be positioned high, close to the forward, with a narrow shape to it – the aim here is to protect central areas and block those early penetrating passes.

They will execute a press when certain triggers become visible—namely, the opposition’s hesitation to go forward. Furthermore, they each have individual roles in the press—as seen above. As the ball is passed to the right back, Japan’s left midfielder will press, while the forward will go and mark the nearest centre-back option. This gives the opposition limited choices in terms of the next pass.

TRANSITIONS



Counterattacking football isn’t something you should expect to see too much of from Japan this year, but they know how to utilise key moments in attacking transitions when the opportunity presents itself. They can be seen to be more reserved in some transitions and hold onto possession, but if there is a strong chance of a break, like the example above, they’ll go for it.

This includes runners scattered across various locations on the front line as they look to create spaces in the opposition defence – the individual technical ability in midfield also plays a vital role in getting the ball into more dangerous positions.

One area to they need to be careful of, though, is those transition moments deep inside their own half against a team that likes to press high. Japan have shown some signs of difficulty in dealing with these scenarios from time to time, so making sure they know when just to clear the danger could play an important role.



In defensive transitions, they often look to regroup, particularly in their own half. Earlier, we mentioned how their wide midfielders frequently tuck inside; well, this lends itself to defensive transitions as they can create a central barrier along with the centre midfielders. Counterpressing isn’t something we see all too often from this Japan side, but that doesn’t mean they never utilise it. The right-back is an excellent example of this – she opts to wait and sit in line with her central midfield teammates rather than charge out and close the ball down, which falls in line with Japan’s defensive tactics.

FORWARDS

As we mentioned, 30 Y/O Mina Tanaka is expected to lead the line for Japan in the Olympics. Her pace and energy can be a handful for the opposition backline, and her ability to link up with the midfield can also be dangerous.

With her in the squad is the Chelsea forward Maika Hamano and West Ham's Riko Ueki, giving Japan the luxury of strong depth in that position. Both backup options have featured for Japan over the past year, but it is believed that Ikeda will opt for the more experienced Tanaka.

MIDFIELDERS

We mentioned our expected starting midfield four, but they also have three options deeper in the squad, two of which are in their prime years. Kiko Seike (Urawa Reds) and Honoka Hayashi (West Ham United) provide that experience from the bench (or in squad rotation). At the same time, 19-year-old Momoko Tanikawa of Rosengård who has scored an incredible 10 goals in 9 appearances in the Damallsvenskan. The teenager made her Japan debut last year, and will be looking to continue her strong career start in a big way.

DEFENDERS

Interestingly, just six defenders have been named in Ikeda's Olympic squad. As Japan is expected to field a 5-4-1 formation, that leaves just one rotation/back-up option on the bench—that option is the youngest player in the whole squad: Feyenoord's Tōko Koga.

She is primarily a central defender, and can play on either side of that role, as well as in the middle, meaning she could replace any of Minami, Kumagai, or Takahashi. Additionally, Koga has experience playing at right-back, so she does bring an element of versatility to the back four/five.

KEY PLAYER

Japan's squad is abundantly quality-rich, and any number of players could be crucial in "make or break" scenarios. However, we're going to spotlight one player who has demonstrated

excellent technical ability, ball progression, and tactical awareness in Japan's midfield: Liverpool's Fuka Nagano.



The 25-year-old is expected to start in one of Japan's central midfield roles, and she brings great on-the-ball composure and "outside-the-box" thinking. She shows good scanning abilities and the skill to pull off a range of difficult and/or important passes. In that sense, she plays a significant role in Japan's tactics when it comes to progressive passes, an element that we highlighted earlier.

An example of her role in those tactics lies above. She shows the vision, composure, and technical execution to provide a perfect first-time lofted pass into space on that left flank. While this may look like a simple decision and action, her initial movement and scanning made it so easy—her technical ability sees to the rest.

Nagano's calming presence in deeper midfield regions and transitions can provide an added edge to Japan's performance, and her creativity in higher areas can give her side an added dimension in attack as well.

TOURNAMENT PREDICTION

Japan's group is a tough one – Spain, Brazil, and Nigeria await them. Japan, currently seventh in FIFA's world rankings, have had mixed success across three games against Brazil (9th in rankings) in the past year – one defeat, one win, one draw. Spain are the current

world number one and the favourites for this tournament, so Japan will have to be at their very best to get a positive result in that one – may also see a more defensive approach from Ikeda in this game. 36th-ranked Nigeria will be hoping to cause an upset by claiming the scalp of any of these three teams, but Japan will look to be focused on claiming all three points to ease the pressure.

Japan are not among the favourites (Spain, the USA, and France are the top three favourites), but they will be pleased by their progress over the last year and will look to use that momentum to have a positive tournament. If they can get out of that very tricky group, which is hard to predict, that will only fuel their momentum and desire. Reaching the semi-final is not over-ambitious, but they have to be aware of the sheer quality that lies within the tournament.



2024 OLYMPICS GROUP C

ONOME EBI



NIGERIA

NIGERIA

JACK CHIPPENDALE // @JACKCHIPPY6

Last summer's World Cup saw the exciting resurgence of Africa's most decorated female football team, with the Nigerian Super Falcons ultimately bowing out to eventual finalists, England. Emerging from a group with talented hosts Australia and reigning Olympic gold medalists Canada was an extraordinary feat in itself, with the Nigerians displaying excellent levels of quality play and defensive resilience. Whilst a penalty shootout loss to England was a cruel way to exit the competition, it provided the nation with an important platform to build upon, with fans once again excited by their national team.

In the space of 12 months, the Super Falcons have endured a rollercoaster qualifying phase, which has ultimately seen Nigeria qualify for their first Olympic games since Beijing 2008. With the 16-year drought finally overcome, head coach Randy Waldrum cited the team's defensive strength after critical 1-0 aggregate victories against Cameroon and South Africa. Nigeria will have to display another summer of resilience, as they look to tackle another 'group of death' alongside world champions Spain, Japan and Brazil.

Ahead of an intense Olympic games in which 12 of the world's best nations will go head-to-head, the lack of preparation-friendly matches has worried Waldrum, who has not been shy when challenging the nation's footballing federation. Having split coaching responsibilities between the Super Falcons and the University of Pittsburgh since the World Cup, it begs the question of whether Nigeria will be tactically ready ahead of their opening encounter with Brazil.

This tactical analysis will highlight Nigeria's play both in and out of possession, providing insight into how they are staking their claim to become Africa's best once again. Our analysis will also identify the Super Falcon's key player, who we think could make all the difference when

observing the need to improve their attacking tactics.

PREDICTED STARTING XI

Coming off the back of a successful showing in last year's World Cup, it would be wise to suggest that Nigeria will continue utilising the 4-2-3-1 under the guidance of Randy Waldrum. The formation allows a healthy balance of defensive solidity and remaining threatening at the business end of the pitch with nice interchanges. Should Nigeria become under significant threat within the group phase, this allows for their number ten to drop deeper and provide more midfield superiority whilst a member of the double-pivot acts as the anchor ahead of the defensive line, switching to more of a 4-1-4-1.



After guiding Paris FC to a spot in the UCWL, Nigeria's ever-present Chiamaka Nnadozie will be their shot-stopper between the sticks, guiding

the Super Falcons to consecutive clean sheets against Cameroon and South Africa in qualifying. Nigeria's defensive line will probably comprise Ashleigh Plumptre and Michelle Alozie on the flanks, with Osinachi Ohae and Oluwatosin Demehin being a dependable pairing through the middle. The Super Falcons were able to withstand significant defensive shuffling during the crucial stages of Olympic qualifying, with both Plumptre and Demehin being absent from their final tie due to injury concerns. With a race against time for both players to reach full fitness before the summer, Waldrum will be comforted by the versatility and sharpness of both Chidinma Okeke and Nicole Payne, who impressed when filling in for Nigeria.

In the midfield, we expect to see a double-pivot pairing of Christy Ucheibe and Deborah Abiodun, with the youthful Abiodun looking to overcome her early dismissal at the World Cup and provide the energetic spark in Paris. Halimatu Ayinde offers a resolute defensive profile should Nigeria look to be more conservative, and look out for Juventus' Jennifer Echegini with excellent line-breaking movements, bridging the gap between midfield and attack from the bench. Sevilla's Toni Payne will then look to act as the advanced playmaker, as she possesses impressive attacking intelligence off the ball and a confident, creative profile to operate in tight spaces in possession.

In the final third, it would appear that the Super Falcons will look to lean on Asisat Oshoala to lead the forward line, happy in the knowledge that they have one of the elite strikers in the women's game. Her ability to bring others into play with excellent physical capabilities is supported by her deadly nature within the penalty area. Looking to provide for Oshoala, the creative forces of Rasheedat Ajibade and Uchenna Kanu will be on the wings; it is a nightmare for defences with their technical prowess and unpredictability. With the ability to swap flanks and maintain a high

level of play, both Ajibade and Kanu have been critical for Nigeria.



Looking at their squad composition, it is clear that the Super Falcons have placed their trust in youthful talent, with fewer players above the age of 30. Despite looking young on paper, Nigeria's players have significant experience across the major leagues and will be looking to be competitive against the world's best once again.

ATTACKING PHASE

Despite Nigeria's attacking talent appearing to be the highlight of their overall squad, it is an area which Randy Waldrum has looked to refine and improve ahead of the Paris Olympics. After putting five goals past Ethiopia and seven past Cape Verde in the early qualifying rounds, Nigeria had to grind out two 1-0 aggregate scorelines against both Cameroon and South Africa. It begs the question of whether or not this Nigerian attack will be firing on all cylinders once they face significantly stronger opposition like Spain and Brazil.

In the initial attacking phase, we often see Nigeria shaping up in a 2-4-3-1, with both full-backs slightly higher and the two central defenders spread wide to offer a passing outlet on both sides of the penalty area. With the Nigerian full-backs pulling their markers wide to the touchline, this often leaves the two centre-backs enough

space to carry forward and attack the channels, picking out long-range passes towards their attacking outlets or having the confidence to push forward and break the lines themselves. At the World Cup, Nigeria appeared to struggle against Australia's high press in the 4-4-2. The switch to a more direct approach allowed the Super Falcons to bypass any high turnovers by looking long from the outset. This tactical variation will be crucial when tackling their group-stage matches this year.



In the final third, Nigeria will look to take advantage of the talent they have out the flanks with Kanu and Ajibade, maintaining their width and looking to provide crosses into the penalty area. Not only does this directly create more opportunities in and around the goal for Oshoala, but it also creates space inside the pitch for Toni Payne to operate. Payne is influential with her movement closer to goal, also providing vital passing options and creating offensive overloads on the wings as she drifts across. The ability to flood the box is key for Nigeria, especially when anticipating that their attacking opportunities will be much more infrequent. An avenue of interest would be the movement of Uchenna Kanu appearing at the back post to capitalise on the chance creation of her teammate Ajibade on the left wing.



DEFENSIVE PHASE

On the contrary, Nigerian defensive performances have remained consistent since their surprise showing last summer, in which they conceded just two goals across their four matches. The gritty victories that guided the nation to the Paris Olympics were built upon the defensive resilience of this Nigerian squad, with their combative nature well suited to being successful in tournament football. Nigeria's defensive structure resembles that of a 4-2-3-1 mid-block, but Waldrum has experimented with both a 5-4-1 and a 4-1-4-1 when defending their lead late in the match.



Last summer, Nigeria had just 11.99 PPDA at the World Cup, suggesting that they are happy to sit behind the ball and soak up pressure from their opponents. However, their pressing was particularly impressive at select moments and caused elite teams some significant problems. Their round of 16 encounter with England stood out, as they forced the European champions all the way to penalties by minimising time and space for their critical, creative outlets. After tight marking from the outset, Ucheibe could advance forward to deny Stanway the freedom to turn and force England into rushed decision-making and

halting progression. This continued moments later, with Lauren Hemp dominated midfield, as Demehin stepped up to support, culminating in an inaccurate return pass that allowed Nigeria to threaten in transition.



TRANSITIONS

With the knowledge that they will be down on the possession statistics, attacking in transition stands out as a critical phase in which Nigeria can hurt their opposition. The Super Falcons have the luxury of a plethora of naturally-quick playmakers who love to attack the space and throw bodies forward when the opportunity arises. When she isn't picking up positions in and around the edge of the penalty area, Toni Payne can drop deeper to collect the ball and spread play towards the flanks when drawing attention towards the central areas. Whilst the attacking midfield role can be momentarily vacated, both of Nigeria's double-pivot has the ability to advance into the final third past Payne and, therefore, maintain the necessary attacking numbers in transition.



On the other hand, the Nigerian press can come with its detriments should the aggressive nature of the defending be undone. This was evident in Nigeria's World Cup opener with Canada, as the movement of Ashley Lawrence forced the Nigerian midfielder to overcommit, leaving Sinclair with an excellent opportunity to test the goalkeeper in acres of space.



Nigeria must remain switched on and composed in their defensive structure, especially should they find themselves in the lead.

Against Australia, Nigeria's defensive efforts were almost undone when Alozie could not anticipate Foord's movement at the back post, resulting in a huge chance with Nnadozie luckily preventing a goal.

Nigeria's ability to be combative and regain possession quickly often stems from their counterpressing, which proved effective in their fixture with Australia. As the Matildas won possession in the middle third, the advanced positioning of Alozie gave Ajibade the opportunity to operate centrally, which was integral to Nigeria when regaining the ball as soon as possible. The subsequent 4v4 allowed Payne to attack the space and Kanu to find weakness in a disjointed Australia defence.



When it comes to defending in transition, it would appear that the lack of defensive structure is detrimental to Nigeria's ability to remain compact. Waldrum's offensive structure with the advanced full-backs means that once possession is lost, Alozie's attacking nature, in particular, leaves her out of position and weaker when defending the counter. Lapses in defensive concentration will be the killer for Nigeria, which was evident when conceding the opening goal to Australia at the World Cup- with a 6v4 in Nigeria's favour being torn apart by poor marking.



DEFENDERS

As we have mentioned, the defensive strength of this Nigerian team has surprisingly been the main tool that Waldrum has leaned upon over the past 12 months. Fans of the Super Falcons will feel much more optimistic should their key talents like Plumptre and Demehin be 100% fit after impressive World Cup campaigns. Still, the entire defensive line has shown their quality in an attempt to regain their title as Africa's best. In possession, the overlapping runs of Alozie will be impactful in the final third, whilst Plumptre's inverted positioning can allow Nigeria to have much more ball dominance in the middle of the park. It will be interesting to observe whether or not the ever-experienced Onome Ebi will make the cut, with her incredible leadership potentially making up for a lack of recent playing time.

MIDFIELDERS

Nigeria's midfield unit is incredibly versatile but will have a huge task on their hands when attempting to limit the possession of Spain, Japan and Brazil. Halimatu Ayinde is a really

useful anchor on the defensive side of the ball, who can protect the defensive line without the ball and offer a critical passing outlet in the initial phases of the Nigerian build-up. Whilst the 4-2-3-1 would allow Payne to float just behind Oshoala, the ability for the midfield trio to interchange and run off one another could pose a significant threat and confusion to opposition defences.

FORWARDS

It is clear that Nigeria's forwards will want to build on a somewhat underwhelming 12 months despite achieving their long-term goal of Olympic qualification. Asisat Oshoala is an excellent striker to spearhead the Nigerian attack, with pace and physicality to stretch opposition defences and naturally create space for her teammates. We can expect Nigeria to remain consistent in their desire to attack the flanks, and for good reason. In line with their youthful approach, Gift Monday can undoubtedly inject some life into the Nigerian attack and terrorise tired defences with her ability to take on defenders.

KEY PLAYER

The performances of Rasheedat Ajibade suggest that she is ready to lead this Nigerian squad into battle with her creative flair and well-rounded profile. After guiding Atlético Madrid to a vital spot in the UWCL, Ajibade has displayed the necessary qualities to shoulder the attacking responsibility for her team. Having the ability to be effective on both flanks adds an essential element of tactical variation that Waldrum can use to exploit potential weaknesses from their opposition. During her season in the Primera División, Ajibade has racked up an impressive 4.97 progressive carries and 2.59 successful take-ons per 90. In addition to this, Ajibade's 5.79 penalty area touches per match would support the notion that she can be incredibly influential when driving inside off the flank.



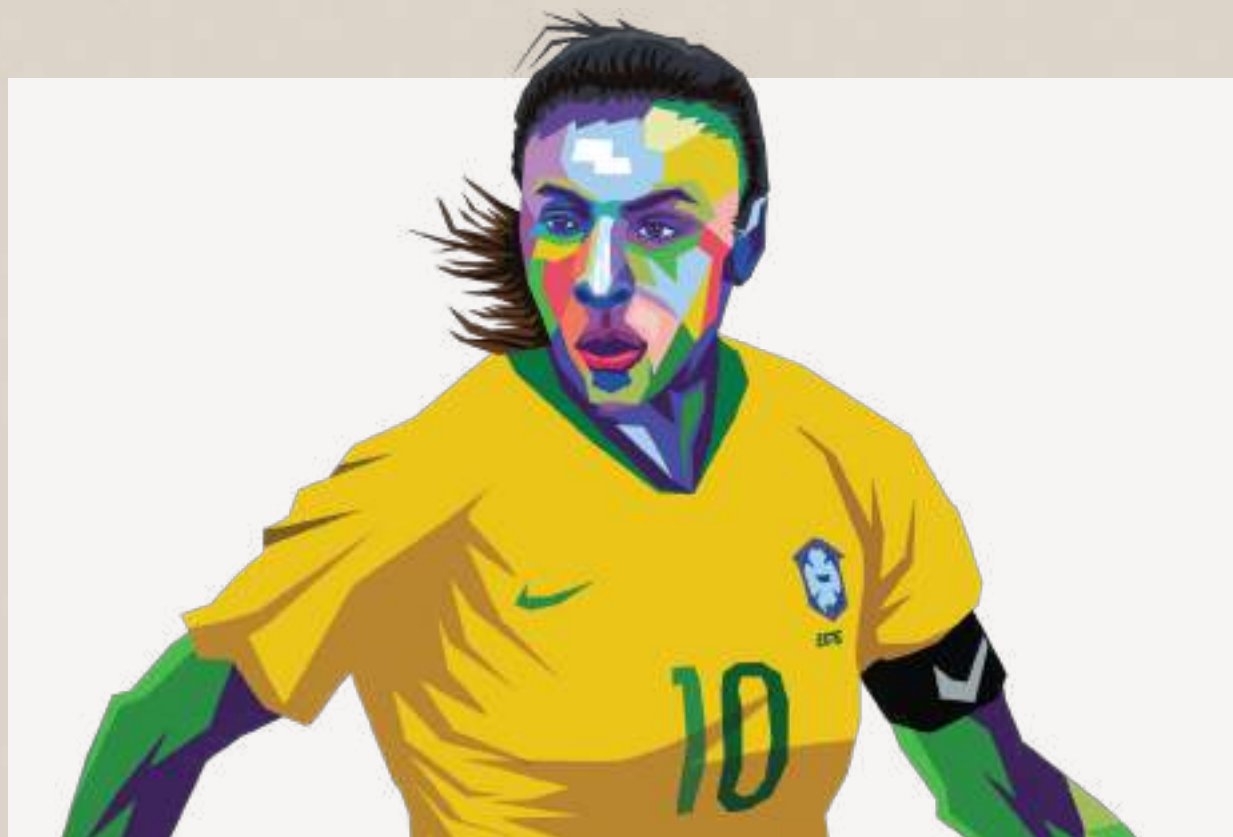
TOURNAMENT PREDICTION

A potential group-stage exit should not overshadow Nigeria's achievement of qualifying for the Olympics, but they will find confidence, having bested a proclaimed 'group of death' once before. The alarming lack of adequate preparation has definitely thrown a spanner in the works, with off-field turmoil significantly impacting Nigeria's tactical development. Whatever occurs in Paris, Nigeria's usage of youthful talent will only further their international progression with key figures who could always spring a surprise with the right tactical matchups. It would be fair to suggest that Nigeria's group may be too strong this summer to overcome.



2024 OLYMPICS GROUP C

MARTA



BRAZIL

BRAZIL

Brazil have a nice mix of star quality with experience, as well as a number of promising youth players expecting to make the squad. Their new coach, Arthur Elias, joined the team after last year's World Cup and has since led Brazil to a final in the Gold Cup earlier in the year. The team looks on the up, and with Brazil recently being announced as the next hosts of the Women's World Cup, there is plenty of optimism among the nation about its future.

Following Brazil's women's Copa America win in 2022, they sealed their spot at the Olympics and are now placed in a group along with Spain, Japan and Nigeria. Their current group is tough, but with a third-place spot potentially being enough to qualify, we can expect Brazil to reach the knockout stages.

This tactical analysis will discuss whether or not Brazil have a chance at progressing to the next stage or not, and if they do, the tactics that will allow them to do so. The analysis will focus on Brazil's games since Elias took charge in October of last year, and how he has been setting his team up in the past few months. We will predict their starting line-up ahead of the tournament and how they will set up when attacking and defending.

PREDICTED STARTING XI



We expect Brazil to line up in a 3-4-2-1 system, which has most frequently been used since the new manager's appointment late last year.

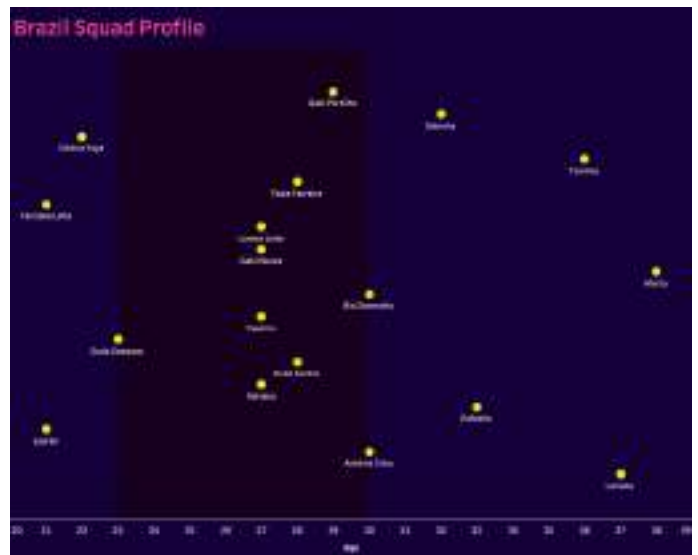
37-year-old Luciana is expected to start in goal following a strong showing in the Gold Cup earlier in the year. In league competition for Ferroviária, after 12 games, she has only conceded five goals, showing the strong form has maintained all year. Antonia Silva will start at the right side of the back three, with her having started the role in fourteen of the coach's fifteen games in charge, earning his trust immediately. In the heart of defence, at the centre of the back three, 21-year-old Lauren will likely play. Although she has hardly featured for the club this season, she has often represented Brazil's senior squad after winning the South America under 20 Championship in 2022 and earning third place at

the u20 World Cup. At left centre-back, Rafaelle has regularly featured in the role. After swapping Arsenal for Orlando Pride, she is currently part of the defence which has only conceded eleven goals in thirteen league games.

We expect Adriana, Rafaelle's teammate, to hold the width on the right flank, playing as the wing-back, although she is an attacking-minded player. Duda Sampaio of Corinthians is helping her club dominate the league with twelve wins in the thirteen opening games of the season from the centre of the pitch. Although she is a more attack-minded option, her partner, Duda Santos, will attempt to provide some balance. At left wing-back, Yasmim, a natural left-back, will play.

Bia Zaneratto is expected to start on the right-hand side in the front three. The front three will remain fairly narrow, so even though she has often started as the centre forward for her club and managed 9 goal contributions in 8 league starts, the role will be fairly similar for Brazil. On the left side, 38-year-old Brazil legend Marta is expected to play, although she missed the Gold Cup earlier in the year. Gabi Nunes will lead the line at centre forward after eleven goals in twenty-three starts for Levante in the Spanish Primera Division.

There are several experienced heads in the Brazil squad. Seven of the players are 30 years old or older, which would have given them numerous attempts at both the World Cup and the Olympics in the past. A further six of the starting eleven for Brazil are in their prime years of their career, between twenty-seven and thirty years old. This mix of experience, peak performers, and several young stars joining the team makes an exciting combination, shaping up a side ready to battle at the Olympics in the perfect conditions and balance of the squad.



ATTACKING PHASE

Brazil will be patient in their football during the build-up. The back three will receive the ball often, although Brazil do not seem to have a bias to their style of playing out of the back. When the space is in the central area, they will attempt to be incisive and play through the press, but they are also able to use other, more direct methods.

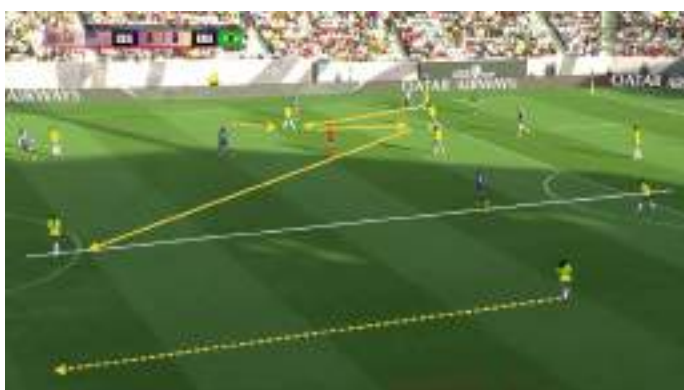
Against a narrow defence, the central defender has the ability to spray long passes to either wing-back, who receives the ball in the areas shown below. The pressure from the opposition usually impacts the next decision, with the wing-back often controlling the ball and driving forward if she has the time and space. When the opposite full-back jumps out of their position, the ball is played into the space they vacate, with the near-sided winger attacking that space, making the run from a central starting point.



When playing through the press, we can expect Brazil to play on one side of the pitch, attracting the opposition to the side before switching play to the other side. The wide centre-back moves wide and deep, receiving the ball by the corner flag to maximise the depth and width available to the team. The double-pivot also moves towards the ball, while the opposite wing-back remains wide to offer an outlet out wide.



The near-sided wing-back and double-pivot are all options for the defenders to play forward. One of the three is used as a bounce pass, laying the ball off to the other forward-facing player. The first-time passes are made quick enough to evade the pressure. When the forward-facing player receives the ball, he switches play to the opposite side, where the wide player can receive the ball unmarked, and the wing-back can make an overlapping run in the wide channel.



Brazil are also able to play over the initial pressure by feeding the ball into the front three. We can see in the image below that the front three are used to pin the defensive line back, which makes the space in front of the defensive line easier to access. Through a direct pass to the front line, one of the midfielders situated deeper can make a third-man run and arrive in the space in front

of the defensive line, where she can receive the ball after a flick down and run at the back line.



In the final third, we can expect underlapping runs commonly used. The wing-backs will hold the width for their sides, while the narrow attacking three will move in the central spaces. When the wing-back has the ball, they will usually force the full-back to jump out of their position, creating space on the flanks. In this case below, the right-sided attacker in the front three will attack that space by making the underlapping run, from where they can either cross the ball into the box or dribble at the next defender.



With the ball in those wide areas, Brazil aim to deliver the ball into the box quickly before the opposition can bring players back into their own box. The other three players in the front line, labelled in the image below, are all in high positions early on, meaning they can attack the box quickly enough to meet early crosses. The movement amongst the players is good, with runs made at different parts of the six-yard box and the players arriving in space with good timing to make life as difficult as possible for the opposition defence.



DEFENSIVE PHASE

The out-of-possession setup is expected to be aggressive. Brazil will press opponents high up the pitch when the opposition build out from the back. The same approach will be used during open play, where, upon a backward pass, the Brazil squad goes woman for woman to force the opponents to go long. The player pressing the goalkeeper arcs their run to cut off the short pass while putting pressure on the ball. This approach forces many long balls as the wing-backs push up and press the full-backs while the midfielders step up to mark the opposition midfielders.



One issue with the aggressive approach is that the defensive back three is left with three individual 1v1 battles against the attacking line. When this happens, Brazil are vulnerable to long balls, and the defenders have trouble deciding between tight marking or dropping off to protect space. In the example below, the central defender wants to avoid the long ball being played in behind, giving the attacker enough space to receive the ball and turn and drive at the defence.



Brazil will maintain a high line, which effectively minimises the space opponents have to play in between the lines, forcing opponents to play over the press. This plays into Luciana's strengths, who is strong at judging the game and frequently roams outside the penalty area to sweep up balls played into the space behind.



TRANSITIONS

Having the front three narrow in settled defence gives Brazil a regular counterattacking threat. The attacking unit is close to and in numbers, which allows them to make short combinations to evade the opponent's counterpress. None of the attackers are isolated, so Brazil is more likely to either retain possession or counterattack after recovering the ball.



The two wide attackers are comfortable in central spaces and wider areas. They operate in central spaces during settled play but are also comfortable moving into wider areas during counterattacks where the space is outside the block.

During the transition back to defence, Brazil's 3-2 rest defence gives them a solid structure at the back. The shape gives them cover along the last line to protect against the balls in behind across the width of the pitch. The double-pivot in front can counterpress the ball after a loss of possession.

One issue that Brazil could face is the lack of aggression in the outside centre-backs during the counterpress. They are hesitant to step up from their positions to intercept passes into the front line, which allows opponents to play the ball into the front line and lets the attack run at the defensive line. The lack of aggression is a worry to their counterpressing and overall ability to sustain pressure on the opposition, which could lead to open games.

FORWARDS

Debinha has played a crucial role in Kansas City's dominant start to the NWSL and a current unbeaten run.

For club, her versatility and unselfishness have allowed her to cover multiple players in multiple positions, and those same traits will be necessary during the Olympics to cover anywhere across the front three or inside the double-pivot.

Gabi Portilho will provide a burst of energy from the bench, coming on from the right wing as she has done at Corinthians in Brazil. The pair are both attacking options who are comfortable in the half spaces on either side of the striker and have both had numerous starts in recent games for Brazil, so it wouldn't be a surprise to see them earn starts in some games.

MIDFIELDERS

Vitoria Yaya will offer depth in central midfield. She has played a vital role in Corinthians' current dominance of the league campaign. She is a potential creative spark that Brazil can turn to when it needs it, with a willingness to consistently play balls into space beyond the defensive line.

Yaya has the patience to delay the pass until the right moment and can evade pressure and hold off opponents to wait until the right moment comes. She has the range in her passing to play balls over the top or on the floor, with a range of distances at her disposal.

Her teammate Tamires will be an option in the wingback department, and her experience will be vital in seeing off games. She is a full-back for her club but has also played higher up the pitch in wide areas, making her a perfect candidate for a wing-back role for her nation.

DEFENDERS

Thais Ferreira and Tarciane Lima will be defensive options along the back three. They have plenty of experience in the recent Gold Cup, so it would be no surprise to see them starting during the Olympics.

The pairing started in the Gold Cup final against the USA, so they have the coach's trust, but with all options available, their minutes will likely be earned off the bench.

Thais Ferreira's versatility portrays a theme along the coach's expected squad picks. Ferreira has played as a holding midfielder for Granadilla but will be used in a central defensive role for Brazil. Lima, a natural central defender for the club, will be used as cover for Brazil, although her lesser experience means that the high-pressure environment will be left to the older squad members.

KEY PLAYER

Marta's experience and quality will be essential to Brazil's success at the Olympics. Although Marta is supposed to retire after the Olympics, the upcoming World Cup in Brazil could potentially change her mind. The six-time World Player of the Year is excellent in the attacking midfield position. She is comfortable in tight spaces and can craft out chances under pressure, whether that is up against a deep compact defence or against a high line, which Marta can exploit by dribbling up the pitch with speed.

While she can create chances through excellent dribbling and passing in short spaces, she can also affect the game over larger spaces in transitions whilst being deadly in front of goal to finish off those attacks as well. A complete player in the front line who will ensure the team succeeds by adapting her role, whether that means becoming more creative or more attacking from game to game.

TOURNAMENT PREDICTION

Based on the analysis above, Brazil will likely qualify out of their group. However, based on the individual quality of some opponents like Spain and the US, a quarter-final or potential semi-final exit is on the cards.



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24/7

**MATCH ANALYSIS
TRAINING ANALYSIS
DATA ANALYSIS
SCOUT REPORTS
TACTICAL THEORY
VIDEO ANALYSIS**



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