

Your Shortcut to... Women's Football (Soccer)

"They've been playing since at least the 1500s...one match in 1920 drew a crowd of 53,000 spectatorsand we're about to see the world's best players take to the pitch for a prize pool of 165 million dollars... This is your Squiz Kids Shortcut to Women's Football (which in Australia we know as soccer)—the podcast where we dive into the who, what, when, where, why and how of the big news stories. I'm Christie Kijurina.

"

"And I'm Bryce Corbett.

"

"Lately on Squiz Kids, we've heard a lot about the FIFA Women's World Cup, but did you know that women's football has a really long history, and more than a century ago, huge crowds were coming to watch the games.

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"Today, we'll take you through WHERE women's football got started, WHAT was happening with soccer in Australia, and WHY the FIFA Women's World Cup is such a big deal!

"

"Listen carefully - there's a Squiz at the end!

"

WHERE

"Bryce, in a previous Squiz Kids Shortcut we learned that the English reckon they invented football and that the rules were written down in 1863, but the game was actually being played long before then... And it wasn't just the men having all the fun. The world's oldest football (dating back to the 1540s) is thought to have been owned by the then Queen of Scotland, Mary Queen of Scots.

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"Imagine that! The queen playing football!

We also know that a poem, written way back in the 1580s by poet Philip Sidney, refers to women playing the game.

[read in Ye Old English]

‘A tyme there is for all, my mother often sayes,

When she, with skirts tucked very high, with girls at football plays.'

"

"Wow Bryce was that you? And, on the 7th of May, in the year 1881, the first officially recorded women's football match took place. A team of Scottish women played against a team of English women in front of 2000 people in Edinburgh, Scotland.

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"That's right. They actually went on to play a few more games, but the fans were so rowdy, that in Glasgow, the match had to be called off. Pitch invaders were running onto the field and the players fled the ground in a horse-drawn bus! Crazy times!

"

"As things got more organised, the British Ladies Football Club or BLFC was formed in London in 1895. The club president was Lady Florence Dixie. Lady Florence was a writer, adventurer, war correspondent and feminist. She made sure that players wore practical clothes, including bloomers (which were long undergarments usually worn under a dress), shin pads and proper boots, because before then they had been playing in skirts, hats and high heels! Imagine!

"

"High heels on football paddock? That would have been a sight to see! Christie, in 1895, the BLFC put on a big match in London, with one team from the North and the other from South of the Thames, that's the big river that divides the city. The northern team won the match 7-1, but with more than 10,000 fans attending, the game was also a win for the women's movement that was pushing for more rights for women and girls, including the right to vote. Go girls!

"

"That's right, and a boost to women's independence came in a most unexpected way. In 1914 the First World War broke out. So many men went off to fight in the war that the men's Football League had to suspend all its matches due to lack of players. Women supported the war effort by working in factories and other jobs that had previously been performed by men. During breaktimes, games of kickabout were a popular pastime, and eventually, a number of munitions factories (where women made weapons for the war), formed their own football teams and started a formal competition.

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"The games were so popular that by 1920, a match on Boxing Day drew a capacity crowd of 53,000 people with 14,000 more locked outside the ground, desperate to get in.

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"So what happened? Why don't we all know about this?

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"Well, by now the war was over, men were returning to work and women were expected to return to their old roles in the home. One esteemed doctor wrote that football was a ""most unsuitable game, too much for a woman's physical frame"". Finally, in 1921, women were banned from playing on Football Association grounds altogether and the 'golden age' of women's football was over....or was it?

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"So what was happening with soccer in Australia?

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WHAT

"Just like it had done in England, in the early 1900s, women's football had become popular in Australia. But the Football Association's decision to ban women playing on grounds in England had a flow-on effect, and in 1921, an Australian committee reported that football was ""medically inappropriate"" for women to play. They encouraged females to participate in more suitable sports like swimming, rowing, cycling and horseriding. [Sigh]

"

"It was a whole fifty years later, in 1971, when the FAs ban was lifted in England, that UEFA, the Union of European Football Associations, started to support a revival of the women's game. About time!

"

"Yes! And the Australian Women's Soccer Association was formed, but with such a tiny budget that players had to pay for their own transport and uniforms; raising money with raffles and lamington bake-sales. And there was no media coverage, so the women would line up at public pay phones after the games to report their results to their families.

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"This didn't deter them though. The first Australian women to play overseas traveled to the 1975 Asian Women's Championship in Hong Kong, but this competition was not recognised by FIFA and the team wasn't recognised as an Australian international team. So, the first-ever Australian womens' international game was against New Zealand. It was part of a 3-match series played in Sydney in 1979, and resulted in a draw.

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"That was a long time coming!

As the popularity of the game continued to grow, FIFA invited 12 nations to participate in a women's competition to be held in China in 1988. And guess what? Australia was one of these nations! The Australian women won their first two games against Brazil and Thailand to make the quarter finals, but were unfortunately then beaten by the host nation, China.

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"But that's not the end of the story. Finally, in 1991, the inaugural or first-ever FIFA Women's World Cup was held.

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"Yay!!!

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"But unfortunately Australia did not qualify.

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"Boo!!

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"But then, in 1995 the Australian women won their way to the second FIFA Women's World Cup in Sweden. This was also the first time that the team were known as The Matildas.

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"Can you believe it... for the first 16 years the team had been known only as Australia!? The men's team, the Socceroos, had their name since 1972, but the women had, up until now, remained nameless.

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"I know! Over the years, many cringy names had been suggested including the 'soccerettes', the 'soccerbelles' and even the 'soccertoos.' With the World Cup fast approaching, it was decided that the Australian women's national team needed their own name.

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"In the best Aussie spirit, way before WhatsApp or Facebook, a phone poll was held by a sports show on SBS television, called 'On The Ball'. People had to pay 25 cents to ring in and vote for a name. The phone lines were inundated and the resounding winner was....[Drumroll] 'The Matildas!'

"

"We all know that name! Since 1995, The Matildas have qualified for every single Women's World Cup and this year, Australia will be co-hosting the 9th one of these mega-events with New Zealand!

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"So, why is the FIFA Women's World Cup such a big deal?

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WHY

"I don't know about you Christie, but I can actually feel the excitement in the air.

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"Me too! From the 20th of July to the 20th of August, the biggest names in the round ball game will be visiting our shores. Marta ""the Queen of Football"" from Brazil, Alexia Putellas from Spain, Asisat Oshoala from Nigeria and Australia's own champion, Sam Kerr, to name just a few!

"

"Don't worry, if you don't know these names yet, we're pretty sure that in a month's time you will.

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"That's right Bryce, the best in the business are about to battle it out! 32 teams in 64 matches over 32 days.

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"\$165 million dollars in prize money is up for grabs. This is 10 times more than was on offer in 2015, but still less than half of what the men's teams were playing for in 2022, so there's still some way to go until the women are rewarded equally.

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"The tournament slogan this year is - Beyond Greatness! And these women truly are...as are those that came before them without the pay or recognition that is available now.

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"So Christie, who are Australia playing first?

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"Well Bryce, the teams are divided into eight groups from 'A' to 'H' and Australia is in group 'B' along with The Republic of Ireland, Nigeria and Canada. Australia will play all those teams and the top two teams in the group advance to the next round. After that, it's a knockout...if you lose, you're out.

"

"And the first games will be New Zealand vs. Norway, and Australia vs. Ireland on July 20th, is that right?

"

Yes, that's it. So rest up your cheering voice, because it will be getting a workout!

THE S'QUIZ

"This is the part of the podcast where you get to test how well you've been listening...

1. Which royal is thought to have owned the world's oldest football?"
2. How did The Matildas' get their name?
3. Which three countries are in Group 'B' with Australia in the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup? (you can have one point for each one you get correct)

That's all we have time for today. Thanks for joining us as we explored the where, what and why of women's football.

Now get out there, and have a most excellent day!

Over and out.