

HOW MANAGERS BUILD THEIR SQUADS

INTRODUCTION

This is the first in a series of insights for women football players on topics which may help you navigate through your career in the women's game. We have chosen some key issues which affect your decisions at various stages, starting with what football managers are looking for and why.

Next, we will suggest how you can present yourself when the right opportunity turns up; and after that, which contract arrangements will be important for you and how an agent can help.

As the game matures, we foresee that players will need to build their knowledge about how the off-field aspects work, and have the tools necessary to make their playing career the best it can be.

HOW MANAGERS BUILD THEIR SQUADS

Putting yourself in the manager's shoes is a good way of developing your understanding of what managers are looking for in players and why.

It will help you understand how decisions are made on recruitment and retention – and why players are released (the 3 Rs). In turn, this should help you decide how to best position yourself when searching for a new team or looking to cement yourself in your current one.

DEPTH

The first important factor managers consider is whether the squad has enough depth: namely, how good their overall cover is for their first eleven. They will look to see with what quality each position is filled, and whether there are enough good-quality players who are likely to break into the first eleven within that season.

They want this for a few reasons: to encourage competition between players for places by keeping them 'hungry' and motivated; to manage unexpected events such as injuries and suspensions; and to have the ability to rotate the squad. Cup competitions are an example of when many managers choose to do this.

POSITION

Although all starting positions are important, managers will likely give priority to the squad's spine, starting with the goalkeeper right through the central midfield and up to the forward line, ensuring there is strength in depth.

Next, managers will ideally look for a couple of players who can play equally well in more than one position. These versatile players are like gold dust, especially if they have a higher player status. They give a manager flexibility when selecting a starting line-up for different formations, as well as when changing tactics during games if they are not working. Although players are expected to interchange, those with the ability to do that well, will also be high up on a manager's list.

A manager's preferred formation is a big consideration when building a squad, and it is very important that players understand where they fit in not only by position, but also in the manager's hierarchy, or what status they may give you. Knowing your status in a squad tells you how important you are to your club and will have an impact on your contract value.

STATUS

Typically, players will be viewed by a manager under specific headings: Key; First-Teamers; Rotation (first and development/reserve players); Back-Up (usually development/reserve players); and Talent-Watch (usually youth players).

It goes without saying that key players will play in almost all the critical matches, and the higher up the pecking-order, the more regularly you will feature. The key players are usually the players that a manager will put on their team sheet straight away.

Managers will typically look to have 6 key players and 7 first-teamers. These will be the manager's core unit. The rest of the squad will consist of rotation, back-up and talent-watch (usually U18s) players. As a player you will need to establish how the manager views you in the squad. This will help manage your own expectations, and help you build your status as you move through your career.

PERSONALITY AND RELATIONSHIPS

Your success is about your ability and equally, it is about your personality. Managers value 'low-maintenance' players who display good professionalism. Building a squad of players who share similar values and have complementary personalities may increase the likelihood of success.

Players need to understand what makes their manager tick, and especially what their core values are. Players who form good relationships with one another always contribute to better team morale, and enable cohesion on and off the field of play. For more senior players, there is also an opportunity to use your experience to help those around you - this cannot be underestimated in terms of the benefits to a manager.

SUMMARY

Managers will have some form of player status structure for how they build their squads. The make-up will very much depend on what their primary formations will be. Understanding where you fit in terms of this will help you develop and manage your career. Relationships are a key part of this process and players who have a positive attitude will be highly advantaged when managers make those important selections.