

BETFRED
WOMEN'S
SUPER LEAGUE
GRAND FINAL 2023



YORK VALKYRIE v LEEDS RHINOS

KO: 15.00

PROMOTION FINAL

BARROW RAIDERS v LEIGH LEOPARDS

KO: 12.00

SUNDAY 8 OCTOBER, LNER COMMUNITY STADIUM

OFFICIAL PROGRAMME

BETFRED



GRAND FINAL 2023

OFFICIAL WELCOME

Another historic year for the women's game

Today's matches bring the curtain down on what's been another history-making year for the domestic game. The first Women's Challenge Cup Final to be played at Wembley Stadium...record attendances at Featherstone Rovers, Leigh Leopards and here at York...and participation at an all-time high.

The Women's Super League was launched in 2017 with two key objectives of growing the game and preparing England for RLWC2021. Since then, we have seen a threefold increase in participation, including the inception and expansion of the Betfred Women's Super League South, Midlands and North, and the legacy from England Women's run to the semi-finals of the World Cup which inspired hundreds of girls to give Rugby League a go.

St Helens successfully defended their Challenge Cup title against Leeds Rhinos at Wembley in August and the photograph of captain Jodie Cunningham lifting the trophy from the stadium's royal box is one of the most iconic Rugby League images of the year. I'm delighted that Wembley will host the final again in 2024 and beyond.

Defeated Challenge Cup finalists Leeds Rhinos are here today, taking on League Leaders York Valkyrie in a repeat of last year's Grand Final which the Rhinos won 12-4 at the Totally Wicked Stadium. To both sides, and to our promotion play-off finalists Barrow Raiders and Leigh Leopards, goes the very best of luck.

Finally, a word of thanks to our hosts York Valkyrie, broadcast partner Sky Sports, commercial partner Betfred, and to every player, volunteer, supporter and administrator who has supported Women's Rugby League in 2023.

Thomas Brindle

General Manager of the Betfred Women's Super League

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**PASSIONATE ABOUT
RUGBY LEAGUE**



**BETFRED WOMEN'S PROMOTION FINAL
BARROW RAIDERS V LEIGH LEOPARDS
KO 12.00PM**

Referee: Elliott Burrow
Reserve referee: Freddie Lincoln
Touch Judge 1: Esmal Wright
Touch Judge 2: Rhiannon Horsmann
Reserve Touch Judge: Rebecca Whiteley
Timekeeper: Mark Hebblethwaite
Match Commissioner: Gerry Kershaw

**BETFRED WOMEN'S SUPER LEAGUE GRAND FINAL
YORK VALKYRIE V LEEDS RHINOS
KO 15.00PM**

Referee: Liam Rush
Reserve referee: Matty Lynn
Video referee: Marcus Griffiths
Touch Judge 1: Andy Smith
Touch Judge 2: Oli Salmon
Reserve Touch Judge: Megan Mills
Timekeeper: Mark Hebblethwaite
Match Commissioner: Gerry Kershaw





RESPECT THE PLAYERS REFEREES & EACH OTHER



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BETFRED



GRAND FINAL 2023

SEASON REVIEW

Looking back... the Betfred Women's Super League 2023

The competition got off to a flying start in April, when reigning champions Leeds Rhinos defeated their Grand Final opponents 34-12 York Valkyrie at Headingley Stadium in front of a record crowd of 5,308.

In Group 2, eventual winners Featherstone Rovers launched their campaign with a 30-8 win against Barrow Raiders. Rovers, of course, gained automatic promotion, while the Raiders today take on Leigh Leopards for the right to join them in Group 1.

After another thrilling Betfred Women's Challenge Cup campaign, old foes St Helens and Leeds Rhinos faced one another at Wembley Stadium in August with Saints becoming the first women's team to lift the trophy at the national stadium.

And the Super League play-offs delivered a fourth meeting of the season for Matty Smith's and Lois Forsell's charges at the Totally Wicked Stadium. This time it was Leeds who were celebrating, courtesy of a Sophie Robinson try in golden point time of an extraordinary match. It was the Rhinos second win against Saints in September – and they had to come from 16-6 down to do it. Tries from Caitlin Beevers and Lucy Murray helped the Rhinos take the tie into extra time, then winger Robinson collected player-of-the-match Caitlin Casey's cross-kick to touchdown and set up a repeat of last year's final.

York also had to come from behind to reach today's final. Wigan Warriors' fourth place finish meant they qualified for the semi-finals, where they took an early lead through a Grace Banks interception try. But England's Tara-Jane Stanley scored one try and was involved in two others as the Valkyrie secured their second successive Women's Super League Grand Final appearance.

The Group 2 semi-finals saw Barrow qualify for today's promotion final with a 62-0 rout of Bradford Bulls, while Leigh Leopards defeated Salford Red Devils 28-10.

With the Betfred Women's Super League moving to an eight-team competition next season, today marks the end of one exciting era and the dawn of another.

BETFRED  **SUPER LEAGUE**

GRAND FINAL

SATURDAY 14 OCTOBER OLD TRAFFORD



IN 2023 IT'S ANYONE'S GAME
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Who will wear the Betfred Women's Super League crown?

The Betfred Women's Super League comes to a dramatic conclusion today when regular season League Leaders' York Valkyrie take on reigning champions Leeds Rhinos here at the LNER Community Stadium.

Today's match-up is a repeat of last season's thrilling finale at the Totally Wicked Stadium, where two tries from England's Caitlin Beevers helped the Rhinos defeat the Valkyrie 12-4 and end a run of three years without silverware.

The Rhinos find themselves in a fifth successive Grand Final – and after a difficult start to the season they're looking to prove the doubters wrong. "We've had a bit of a rocky year", skipper Hannah Butcher told the Yorkshire Evening Post. "Obviously we finished third and lost in the Challenge Cup final at Wembley. We had players go to the NRLW at the beginning of the season, have had injuries and picked up a couple of bans as well. People probably doubted us, but we've made it to the Grand Final. It does fuel you and motivate you."

It was through an extraordinary semi-final win in golden point extra time at St Helens that the Rhinos booked their final place and they are the only team to take points off the Valkyrie this season. Head Coach, Lois Forsell, is hoping for a repeat of that nail biting 12-a-piece draw, "Hopefully the game will be as difficult as the last one we played here - it's going to be two tough teams up against one another and I'm sure going to be another cracker.

"We took confidence from that draw," Forsell told BBC West Yorkshire Sport's James Deighton. "We were disappointed not to get the win in the end, but it was all part of us getting back in that momentum."

York's Sinead Peach was promoted to captain at the beginning of this season and another impressive campaign sees her nominated for the Woman of Steel for a third successive year. The 24-year-old been blown away by her team's response after last year's Grand Final loss. Speaking to Sharon Shortle for BBC Yorkshire she said: "I'm really proud of the girls – we've had a great season this year going unbeaten and we're ready, we're preparing well and we're at a home venue so what more can you want?"

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WOMEN'S
SUPER
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GRAND FINAL 2023

Sinead PEACH

GRAND FINAL PREVIEW

“

I'm **REALLY PROUD** of the girls – we've had a great season this year going unbeaten and we're ready, we're preparing well and we're at a home venue so what more can you want?”

Head coach Lindsay Anfield is no stranger to big games through both her playing career and her role as Director of Rugby at York Valkyrie and she revealed to BBC York that she's also relishing home advantage.

GRAND FINAL PREVIEW

“

WE'RE REALLY EXCITED

and the fact it's at the LNER this time is great. We've played a lot of big games at Headingley and St Helens so the fact it's on home soil feels like it's our time. We're comfortable here and we have a lot of experience in the ground so that's changed the mood in camp.”

Lindsay **ANFIELD**

GRAND FINAL PREVIEW

“

I think we've **MATURED A LOT** since last year and the group has come together and grown closer. It's been a building block here at York. We sat down three years ago and made a plan and said that we wanted to be in Grand Finals – and we've made it.”

Building
Society

BETFRED

**WOMEN'S
SUPER
LEAGUE**

GRAND FINAL 2023



LAST TEN MEETINGS

York **12**, Leeds **12** (SL-G1, 16/7/23)

Leeds **12**, York **34** (SL-G1, 9/4/23)

York **4**, Leeds **12** (SLG1-GF, 18/9/22)

(at Totally Wicked Stadium, St Helens)

Leeds **14**, York **22** (SL-G1, 28/8/22)

York **24**, Leeds **10** (SL-G1, 5/6/22)

York **26**, Leeds **28** (CCSF, 24/4/22)

(at Halliwell Jones Stadium, Warrington)

Leeds **22**, York **18** (SL-SF, 26/9/21)

(at Totally Wicked Stadium, St Helens)

York **4**, Leeds **14** (SL-PO, 29/8/21)

Leeds **68**, York **16** (SL, 18/4/21)

Leeds **28**, York **0** (SL, 4/8/19)

PREVIOUS WOMEN'S SUPER LEAGUE GRAND FINALS

2022

Leeds Rhinos **12** York City Knights **4**

(at Totally Wicked Stadium, St Helens)

2021

Leeds Rhinos **0** St Helens **28**

(at Headingley, Leeds)

2019

Castleford Tigers **12** Leeds Rhinos **20**

(at Totally Wicked Stadium, St Helens)

2018

Leeds Rhinos **16** Wigan Warriors **18**

(at Manchester Regional Arena)

2017

Bradford Bulls **36** Featherstone Rovers **6**

(at Manchester Regional Arena)

GRAND FINAL PREVIEW



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WOMEN'S
SUPER
LEAGUE

GRAND FINAL 2023

SEASON REVIEW

Looking back... Women's Super League South

London Broncos emerged victorious when the Women's Super League South reached a dramatic conclusion in early September.

The Broncos finished the regular season with four wins from five – their only loss a narrow 10-8 defeat at the hands of Cardiff Demons. The side defeated Army RL 22-12 in the semi-finals, with Rebecca Jackson, Nicole Kennedy and captain Courtney Treco all on the scoresheet.

Cardiff Demons went unbeaten in 2023 and made their third successive Grand Final on the back of a convincing 72-8 semi-final win over Bedford Tigers, when full back Leanne Burnell's 38-point haul earned her the player of the match award.

When it came to the final, London Broncos pulled off a stunning 22-10 win over to end the Welsh sides two-year grip on the competition.

Broncos went into half-time 12-6 up against the Demons, thanks to tries from Nicole Kennedy and Eleanor Hunt-Pain, and they continued their fine form in the remaining 40 minutes with Lauren Mueller scoring the final try of the game in the closing minutes to seal the victory.

"Our Grand Final win was a culmination of three seasons of commitment, development and hard work", said London Broncos Head Coach Colin Baker, "and it was a reward for everyone who's been involved since day one or joined us along the way."



2024 CUP FINALS DAY

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WOMEN'S
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GRAND FINAL 2023

TARA JANE STANLEY

FULL BACK, 30

Joined the Knights from Castleford Tigers ahead of the 2022 Betfred Women's Super League campaign. Nominated for Woman of Steel, regular fixture at full-back for England. 18 tries so far this season and integral to most of the good work the Knights do.

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OLIVIA WHITEHEAD, WING, 19

Whitehead signed for the Valkyrie in 2021 and was promoted from number 18 to number 2 ahead of the 2023 season. The Leeds-born winger and full-back has previously featured on England's Diploma in Sporting Excellence (DiSE) programme, the first step on the England Performance Pathway.

TAMZIN RENOUF, CENTRE, 22

Third season with the Knights after joining in May 2021. Try-scoring centre with punch in her carry. Joined the England Women's National Performance Squad earlier this year. One of a clutch of former Castleford players in the squad.

EMMA KERSHAW, SECOND-ROW/CENTRE, 19

A player that many believe has a big future who joined from Wakefield Trinity towards the end of 2021. Capable of playing in the back-row or at centre, Kershaw has retained her place in the England Women's Knights squad this season.

GEORGIA TAYLOR, WING, 26

Taylor joined York in 2019, having never played Rugby League before, through her friendship with centre Bettie Lambert. She was promoted from squad number 15 to number five ahead of the off-season. Taylor represented GB Teachers against UK Armed Forces in the RFL Presidents Cup last year and retained her place in the squad for their match in March, also against the UK Armed Forces.

SADE RIHARI, HALF-BACK, 26

Rihari joined during in the off-season from Salford Red Devils in 2022 and has also featured for Huddersfield Giants. She won the Player of the Match award in their 2021 Betfred Women's Super League Shield win over Featherstone Rovers at Headingley Stadium. Rihari played for Queanbeyan Blues and Mackay Brothers before moving to the UK.

OLIVIA GALE, HALF BACK, 19

Gale has continued to impress since making the half-back spot her own in 2022. Really good rugby brain and brings other players into the game well. Featured in the 2022 BWSL Grand Final.

OLIVIA WOOD, PROP, 22

Moved to the Knights in May 2021 and shared the Players' Player of the Year in 2022 with Hollie-Mae Dodd. The Huddersfield-born prop went on to make three appearances for England during the World Cup last year, scoring one try, against Brazil.

SINEAD PEACH, HOOKER, 25

Joined the Knights in May 2021 as one of a clutch of signings who arrived at the same time as Lindsay Anfield. Ahead of the 2023 season, she was promoted to the role of captain. The Leeds-born player won the club's Forward of the Year award at the end of 2022 and is a Woman of Steel nominee for a third successive season.

JASMINE BELL, LOOSE FORWARD, 24

A new recruit ahead of the 2022 campaign from Castleford Tigers, Bell has continued to impress this season with the Castleford-born forward promoted to the England Women's Squad this season. Dominant presence in the middle with a powerful carry but also able to find a pass to link play.

LACEY OWEN, SECOND ROW, 23

Whitehead signed for the Valkyrie in 2021 and was promoted from number 18 to number 2 ahead of the 2023 season. The Leeds-born winger and full-back has previously featured on England's Diploma in Sporting Excellence (DiSE) programme, the first step on the England Performance Pathway.

SAVANNAH ANDRADE, SECOND ROW, 23

Andrade joined York in May 2021 from Bradford Bulls and made an immediate impression – scoring a hat-trick in the Betfred Women's Challenge Cup Semi-Final victory over Castleford Tigers. She has maintained her place in the England Women National Performance Squad since January.

AIMEE STAVELEY, PROP, 34

Staveley was York's most eye-catching signing of the off-season, signing from rivals Leeds Rhinos. Staveley is a twice BWSL Grand Winner (2017 with Bradford & 2019 with Leeds). She also appeared in the 2018 and 2021 BWSL Grand Finals.

RHIANNION MARSHALL, LOOSE FORWARD, 30

One of the most gifted rugby players in the competition, and has featured in three BWSL Grand Finals: 2017 for Featherstone Rovers, 2018 for Leeds Rhinos and 2019 for Castleford.

ASHLEIGH HYDE, WING, 27

York born-and-bred and has played for the club since 2012. Returned to play shortly after giving birth in 2021, gaining a lot of attention and admiration in the process. Tough tackler and carrier.

BETTIE LAMBERT, WING, 25

Ireland international who played for York in the years where they were struggling in the Women's Super League and which now impresses at the top of the table.

GRACE FIELD, PROP, 27

One of the best forwards in Super League. Dominant presence in the Knights pack and very much a key player for Lindsay Anfield's team. Regular presence in the England national team in recent years. Field made three appearances during the World Cup last year, scoring one try, against Brazil.

GEORGIE HETHERINGTON, UTILITY, 26

Second full season with the Valkyrie this year. Can play at hooker, but more at home in the halves. Hetherington featured in the 2022 BWSL Grand Final.

ALISHA CLAYTON, PROP, 25

Another dominant prop who is one of the club's longest serving players. She was appointed as the Co-Captain of the GB Teachers in March

ENGLAND DOUBLE-HEADER

HEADINGLEY STADIUM, LEEDS • SATURDAY 4 NOVEMBER 2023



ENGLAND
RUGBY LEAGUE



WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL

12:00

ENGLAND
RUGBY LEAGUE



MEN'S INTERNATIONAL

14:30

FROM £25 ADULTS & £12.50 U16S

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BETFRED



GRAND FINAL 2023

ZOE HORNBY

LOOSE FORWARD, 24

Zoe earned her place with the Rhinos after a successful trial and made her debut against York after the Women's competition resumed in 2021. Last season she was named Player of the Match after scoring a try in the Challenge Cup Final and then scored a try in the Super League semi-final to help her side book a place in the Grand Final where she was part of the winning side. Last season her form earned her selection for the England Performance squad.

LEEDS RHYNS
SQUAD



SOPHIE ROBINSON, CENTRE, 26

Sophie has been with the Rhinos since their first season and in last year's Super League semi-final against St Helens she scored two tries and her 100th point to see her team through to the Grand Final. She's a clever defender and a dangerous strike player in attack. She's quick and agile and has proved to be a great threat out wide for the team.

CAITLIN BEEVERS CENTRE, 22

Caitlin made her debut aged 16 in the club's first season. She can play wing, centre and full back. In 2022 she was named Player of the Match in the Grand Final and ended the season as part of the England World Cup squad. This year she was appointed co-captain. Suffered a shoulder injury in the second game of this season but returned against Warrington in the league and scored the game-turning try in the Challenge Cup semi-final.

HANNA BUTCHER, CENTRE, 32

The Rhinos captain is one of the first names on the team sheet. She is a two-time Grand Final and Challenge Cup winner and has regularly played stand-off for Leeds but last year switched to centre, where she has excelled. She's has a keen eye in attack and regularly breaks defences down with her direct running and slick handling. She has played in all the Rhinos Finals.

SOPHIE NUTTALL, CENTRE/WING, 23

Sophie has been with the Rhinos since their inaugural season where she won a Challenge Cup and played in the Grand Final. She is a consistent performer in each game, her attitude to defence and attack, playing well above her weight has earned her the respect of the whole squad.

CAITLIN CASEY, HALF-BACK, 18

The former Oulton Raidettes player was promoted to the first team squad this season from the club's Academy where she has been a regular for Matty Bullough's squad. Made her debut in the opening game of the campaign against York and has continued to impress the Rhinos coaching staff throughout this season.

SAM HULME, HOOKER, 24

Gale has continued to impress since making the half-back spot her own in 2022. Really good rugby brain and brings other players into the game well. Featured in the 2022 BWSL Grand Final.

KEARA BENNETT, HOOKER, 20

Awarded the number nine shirt for the 2021 season, Keara Bennett was one of a number of Rhinos players that has come through the Academy to debut for the Women's first team in recent years. Bennett was promoted to the first team during the 2019 'double' season as the Rhinos clinched the Women's Challenge Cup and Grand Final. The hooker started her junior rugby at Brotherton Bulldogs, where she received coaching from her mentor and head coach Lois Forsell.

AMY HARDCASTLE, SECOND-ROW, 34

Leeds Rhinos signed two-time treble winner and England international Amy Hardcastle from St Helens ahead of the 2023 season. She was one of the stand-out players for England in last year's World Cup and makes her return to Yorkshire after committing her future to the reigning Women's Super League Champions. Made her debut for the Rhinos against York and has played in the second row for Leeds this season.

BETHAN DAINTON, SECOND-ROW, 34

Bethan is a serving soldier who previously played for Rugby Union side Harlequins, where she won the Premier 15 title in 2021 and became the first service woman to play for the Barbarians. She is a dual code international, who won eight caps in Rugby Union for her country before winning her first cap in Rugby League in 2022.

JASMINE CUDJOE, HOOKER, 23

Jasmine Earnshaw-Cudjoe signed for the Rhinos ahead of the 2022 season and played in the Grand Final win against York. She can play hooker or in the halves and joined Castleford Tigers when they formed in 2016 after starting her playing career with Lindley Swifts and Brighouse Rangers.

BETH LOCKWOOD, PROP, 24

Beth was part of the inaugural Rhinos squad and made her debut in the club's first game against Bradford Bulls. She made a further three appearances that season before leaving the club to join York while she studied for a degree in Sport and Exercise Science at University in the city. She returned to the Rhinos in 2021 and earned a starting place in the semi-final against her old club and then played in the winning Grand Final team.

TASHA GAINES, HOOKER/WING, 27

Taylor joined York in 2019, having never played Rugby League before, through her friendship with centre Bettie Lambert. She was promoted from squad number 15 to number five ahead of the off-season. Taylor represented GB Teachers against UK Armed Forces in the RFL Presidents Cup last year and retained her place in the squad for their match in March, also against the UK Armed Forces.

IZZY NORTHPROP, PROP, 23

Leeds Rhinos Women signed Izzy Northrop from Huddersfield Giants ahead of the 2023 Betfred Women's Super League season. She joined the Giants Academy and went on to win the Super League Shield with the club in 2021 and was named Vice Captain in 2022. In 2022 she was also named in the England RL Students squad.

ELLE FRAIN, SECOND-ROW, 23

Elle has been a regular for the first team since being promoted from the Academy in 2019, where she was vice-captain. She originally played back row, but has become a useful utility and has covered second-row, centre and wing. She played in the 2019 winning Challenge Cup Final team and was a try scorer in the Grand Final to help her team secure the double.

TARA MOXON, WINGER, 26

Winger Tara Moxon joined Leeds Rhinos Women in from Wakefield Trinity Ladies, where she earned a call up to the England Knights squad. She made a try-scoring debut for the Rhinos against York and last year played in the Grand Final winning team. Moxon grew up in East New Britain in Papua New Guinea and was first introduced to the sport when she was around five years-old.

KAIYA GLYNN, PROP, 27

Started playing Rugby League with the Army in 2018 and was the team's top points scorer in 2021 and had another standout season in 2022. Her efforts saw her earn selection for the England Community Lions in 2022. Joined the Rhinos in 2023 and marked her debut with a try against Huddersfield Giants in the league.

JENNA GREENING, SCRUM-HALF, 31

Jenna Greening recently returned to playing Rugby League with the Army after a ten-year break from the game. She is an Army Reservist, who plays in the halves. Last season she was a try scorer in the 10-0 win against the Navy to help the Army win their 13th consecutive Inter Services title and was also selected to represent the England Community Lionesses.

LUCY MURRAY, SECOND-ROW, 20

Lucy came through the Rhinos Women's Academy to make her debut in 2021 on the opening day of the season against York before earning a regular place in the squad and being one of the team's most consistent performers. After missing the majority of the 2022 season through injury, she returned to the squad in their final home game against York and made a big impression.

RUBY ENRIGHT, FULL BACK, 19

Ruby was promoted to the first team this year from the Academy after a great start to the campaign. She made a try-scoring debut on the wing against Leigh Leopards in the quarter-finals of the Betfred Women's Challenge Cup.

BELLA SYKES, HOOKER, 19

Leeds Rhinos Women strengthened their squad with the signing of Bella Sykes from Huddersfield Giants Women in June 2023. She made her debut against Huddersfield Giants and was Cup tied for the Challenge Cup Final. She is part of the England Knights squad, featuring against the Cook Islands in a friendly in 2022, and has also represented England Students.



**We
are
Ready**



THE new
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Inclusion – it's in our DNA

In 2020 the RFL published TACKLE IT, a sport-wide action plan to make Rugby League a truly inclusive sport by tackling discrimination and breaking down any barriers to involvement. And among the plan's many objectives and actions is an expectation that we promote and celebrate diversity and inclusion within our game – now through the RL Together campaign.

RL Together puts inclusion at the forefront of high-profile events such as today's Women's Super League Grand Final. And throughout the season professional clubs delivered inclusion fixtures under the RL Together banner, using them as a platform for connecting with communities and showcasing all what's happening on the ground at club level.

In March Castleford Tigers became the first Betfred Super League club to deliver an inclusion fixture, when they entertained the newly crowned World Club Champions St Helens in a match broadcast live by Channel 4. The Tigers used the occasion to shine a light on Physical Disability Rugby League (PDRL), with World Cup winners Mark Gummerson and Nick Kennedy beamed live into the homes of some 400,000 TV as part of the C4 matchday presentation.

Most Super League clubs – and several Betfred Championship clubs – delivered inclusion fixtures in 2023, with all clubs expected to do so next season. Because inclusion is part of Rugby League's DNA. And by becoming more diverse and standing firm against discrimination, Rugby League will be a stronger sport – one that is truly representative of all its communities.

In September Wigan Warriors became the final team to run an inclusion fixture during the regular season. Since 2022 the Warriors have fielded teams for PDRL, Learning Disability Rugby League (LDRL) and Wheelchair Rugby League, as well as boasting a Women's Super League Team and an impressive Girl's Academy. And all of those teams were celebrated as part of a 'Festival of Inclusivity'.

RL TOGETHER



BETFRED

**WOMEN'S
SUPER
LEAGUE**

GRAND FINAL 2023

GROUP 2 FINAL PREVIEW

Women's Super League Promotion Final Preview

Leigh Leopards and Barrow Raiders are today looking to secure a place in a revamped eight-team Betfred Women's Super League for 2024.

The sides most recently met on the final day of the regular season when it looked like the winner would clinch automatic promotion however a 14-12 victory for the Raiders allowed Featherstone to grab top spot via points difference following a dominant win over Bradford Bulls.

Barrow went on to once again beat the Bulls 62-0 in the Semi-Finals a fortnight ago whilst the Leopards had a sterner test against Salford Red Devils but managed to come out on top 28-10.

Leigh had won the previous two meetings between the sides ahead of their final day clash beating Barrow in the Betfred Women's Challenge Cup 30-22 before a league win in Cumbria, 14-0, back in July.

Both clubs have enthusiastically embraced the development of Women's and Girls' Rugby League in recent years. Barrow are aiming to bring BWSL rugby to Cumbria for the first time, while Leigh owner Derek Beaumont was determined to include the town's Women's team as part of the Leopards rebranding last winter, although they retain a strong relationship with the Leigh Miners Rangers community club.

Kieran Purtill, who has forged a strong reputation in coaching in the men's game before taking over as Head Coach this season, said: "The Women's game is coming on in leaps and bound and this will be a really big occasion. It's a fantastic venue with a great playing surface and everyone knows what is at stake.

"Barrow turned us over at the LSV and we know they are really good opponents so it will be an exciting game."

BARROW RAIDERS

Louise Clarke, Leah Clough, Leah Cottier, Mia Dobson, Demi Fisher, Kelly Friend, Fran Harley, Claire Hutchinson, Emma Hutchinson, India Jackson, Michelle Larkin, Beth Lindsay, Jodie Litherland, Laura Mellen, Jodie Morley, Sam Norman, Hannah Sherlock, Emily Stirzaker, Amy Sunderland, Vanessa Temple, Charlotte Todhunter

Head Coach: Amanda Wilkinson

LEIGH LEOPARDS

Isla Aspden, Toryn Blackwood, Olivia Boyham, Thianna Burke, Claire Collins, Ellise Derbyshire, Hattie Dogus, Elise Gater, Grace Hill, Kate Howard, Emma Knowles, Kiera McCosh, Charlotte Melvin, Kirsty Millington, Keli Morris, Leah Morris, Rebecca Owen, Rachel Porter, Mairead Quinn, Victoria Rosevere, Beth Stott, Mackenzie Taylor

Head Coach: Kieron Purtill



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£1 million of funding has been distributed to the Women's and Girl's Game



Growth in Women's teams since 2016



1.1m viewers tuned in to watch England v New Zealand in the RLWC21 Semi-Final

A new national pyramid structure for women's RL connecting the whole country via our regional strategy

Development of Women's RL, a Set of 6

- Range of playing opportunities from primary school age to Masters
- Female coaching leadership programme
- Targeted female match officials group
- New College and University programmes
- Diploma of Sport Education for Females
- England Knights Women Launched

2023 Woman of Steel revealed to be at Rugby League Awards Night

Reigning Woman of Steel Tara Jane Stanley and her 2021 predecessor Jodie Cunningham are among six contenders for the most prestigious individual honour in Women's Rugby League this season.

They are the only two former winners on the shortlist, with the other four nominees including the former England captain Emily Rudge, her St Helens team-mate Shona Hoyle, the York Valkyrie captain Sinead Peach and the Leeds Rhinos hooker Keara Bennett, who is comfortably the youngest contender as she has yet to turn 21.

Lindsay Anfield is nominated for Coach of the Year for a second successive season alongside St Helens' Matty Smith and Marie Colley of Featherstone Rovers – Colley being the sole nominee from Group 2 of the BWSL across all three awards in recognition of her achievement in steering Rovers to the automatic promotion place.

The three contenders for this year's BWSL Young Player of the Year are Huddersfield's prolific try-scoring wing Amelia Brown, the Leeds half-back Caitlin Casey, and the York Valkyrie centre Emma Kershaw.

The 2023 Woman of Steel will be crowned at Rugby League's biggest and most inclusive Awards Night at Emirates Old Trafford next Tuesday (10 October).

The Woman of Steel voting panel consists of Women's Rugby League experts and evangelists Tanya Arnold, Jenna Brooks, Lorraine Marsden and Danika Priim (also a former England international), joined by the England Women Head Coach Stuart Barrow, and BWSL General Manager Thomas Brindle.

The Coach of the Year and Young Player of the Year awards are determined by a separate panel of performance experts led by Stuart Barrow.

Woman of Steel nominees

Keara Bennett (Leeds Rhinos)

Jodie Cunningham (St Helens)

Shona Hoyle (St Helens)

Sinead Peach (York Valkyrie)

Emily Rudge (St Helens)

Tara Jane Stanley (York Valkyrie)

Young player of the year

Amelia Brown (Huddersfield Giants)

Caitlin Casey (Leeds Rhinos)

Emma Kershaw (York Valkyrie)

Coach of the year

Lindsay Anfield (York Valkyrie)

Marie Colley (Featherstone Rovers)

Matty Smith (St Helens)





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England Community Lionesses to make history this weekend

England Community Lionesses make history this weekend when they begin their first ever overseas tour.

Head Coach, Peter Grayburn, and a squad of twenty players take on Serbia in Belgrade today and next Sunday in a two match series.

The team was selected after a trial process that originally started with 140 names nominated and brings together a mix of the best players from across the Community Game - Sheffield Eagles have five inclusions, the new Women's Super League South champions London Broncos have two, three players from Stanningley and Hull KR have been selected, Dewsbury Moor, Thatcho Heath Crusaders, Swinton Lions, Bedford Tigers and Leamington Royals are also represented.

The series is the first time that Serbia Women have faced a representative England side and the historic event will be marked with a visit to the British Embassy.

Sue Nuemann (London Broncos), Nichola Gross (Bedford Tigers), Lois Brown (Hull KR) and Mia-Jayne Atherton (Swinton Lions) all featured for the Lionesses during their thrilling 22-12 defeat of England DiSE earlier this year.

ENGLAND COMMUNITY LIONESSES:

Claire Fisher, Sarah Palmer, Lisa Parker, Agnes Wood, Victoria Thomas (**all Sheffield Eagles**), Tilly Davies, Lauren Exley, Chloe Wainwright-Morley (**all Stanningley**), Aaliyah Brewster, Lois Brown, Carla Nolan (**all Hull KR**), Sue Nuemann, Sophie Messem (**both London Broncos**), Faye Barraclough, Nancy Hirst (**both Dewsbury Moor**), Olivia Argent, Arabella Reed (**both Thatcho Heath Crusaders**), Mia-Jayne Atherton (**Swinton Lions**), Nichola Gross (**Bedford Tigers**) and Sophie Henry (**Leamington Royals**).

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REGIONAL COMPETITION

New second tier competitions fuel expansion of Women's Super League

Two new regional competitions were launched in 2023, completing tier two of a national Women's and Girl's competition pyramid.

Cheltenham Phoenix, Coventry Bears, Leamington Royals and Telford Raiders all competed in the Women's Super League (WSL) Midlands, playing one another at home and away before a top of the table clash on August Bank Holiday decided who would be crowned the inaugural champions.

Coventry made their return to the women's game and the new regional league meant they could offer competitive games once again, much to the delight of the club who have seen a surge in interest since the Rugby League World Cup. And though Cheltenham and Telford were completely new to Rugby League, both teams exceeded expectations.

Telford Raiders and Coventry Bears made it to the WSL Midlands Grand Final through their first and second place standings at the end of the season. The Raiders took the new competition by storm this year and celebrate their first piece of silverware after an impressive 34-18 win against the Bears.

"The first ever WSL Midlands final was a great occasion", said Telford Raiders coach Fred Baker. "Both teams did themselves and their clubs proud and Coventry pushed us all the way. I was thrilled at the way the team applied the skills and game knowledge they've learnt over the last few months, and we're already planning our return next year."

Meanwhile, the WSL North had a 'soft launch' this summer, with a series of matches between Newcastle and Workington Town. The aim is to introduce a Scottish team in 2024.

From 2024 the Betfred Women's Super League will expand to a single eight-team competition, underpinned by the four regional leagues – establishing a pathway for ambitious clubs from all parts of the UK to earn promotion to the elite level.

RFL continues exciting schoolgirl's project

The Rugby Football League this year launched an exciting new project this year to encourage more primary school aged girls to take up the sport.

RugBees is open to girls aged 7-11 and is being delivered by over 20 club foundations to help them develop their confidence in areas such as catching, passing and kicking – whilst having plenty of fun too. It's the first Rugby League programme to be developed specifically for primary school-aged girls with the popular RLWC2021 mascot RugBee bringing the project to life.

St Helens and England star Jodie Cunningham, who is also the RFL's National Women's and Girl's Development Manager introduced the groundbreaking project after reading findings from the Charity 'Women in Sport.' The report – Sport, stereotypes and stolen dreams: Why girls still feel they don't belong in sport – found that over half of parents (57%) said their daughter had felt excluded from sport, with a quarter (26%) confirming their daughter had been told 'it wasn't for girls'.

"When I read the report," says Jodie, "I was really saddened to find out how excluded young girls feel from physical activity – and it proves why RugBees is such an important project. The sessions give girls a fun and enjoyable environment to play Rugby League and build their confidence up to a place where hopefully they will then want to join a team and play competitively.

"The reaction to Rugbees has been incredible and we've had around 370 girls taking part this year alone."

Rugbees has given children like Ellie an opportunity to play a game she felt she couldn't play because of her diabetes, the contact required and the personal equipment she carries for her condition – a pump and sensor. Ellie is now thriving at Barrow, loving the game and learning so much from the sessions both personally in her confidence and fitness and is eager to see where it takes her maybe even joining a RL team in the future. Thanks go to Ruth Parker at Barrow Raiders for all her support and encouragement.

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Like Barrow Raiders, today's Grand Finalists Leeds Rhinos have had great success when delivering the Rugbees programme, as Rhinos Foundation Women's and Girl's Development Officer, Ellis Pascall, explains:

"We have had a fantastic response to Rugbees and 12 of the girls have actually started attending training at local community club, North Leeds Leopards, after how much they enjoyed our weekly sessions. None of these girls had ever played Rugby League before and we now have another four going to different community clubs throughout the city."

York Valkyrie, meanwhile, have extended their RugBees programme following the success of the girl's pathway sessions this summer. Sessions will continue into the Autumn at the York St John University Sports Park every Monday, 7pm-8.

HERE COMES RUGBEES!





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