

SUNDAY 6 OCTOBER

GRAND FINAL

TOTALLY WICKED STADIUM



OFFICIAL PROGRAMME



OFFICIAL WELCOME

I'm delighted to welcome you to the conclusion of another momentous season of Women's Rugby League, here at the Betfred Super League Grand Final. We're at the home of the League Leaders, St Helens, who have had a fantastic season. Under the leadership of Matty Smith, nominated for Coach of the Year, St Helens have gone undefeated since the opening round against their opponents today, York Valkyrie. Saints also celebrated their fourth consecutive Betfred Challenge Cup victory at Wembley, marking yet another great moment for the sport. However, today's occasion is significant as it's their first Grand Final appearance since 2021, the year they won the treble. Perhaps history will repeat itself today. I'm sure the ever-impressive Faye Gaskin, a Women of Steel nominee, will be determined to make that happen, as she competes in her final game before retiring to start a family.

On the other side, York Valkyrie will be equally determined to prevent that. They're aiming to become the first team to win back-to-back Grand Finals. Their season has been challenging due to the loss of several key players, including last year's Woman of Steel, Sinead Peach, who is expecting her first child, and Tara-Jane Stanley, another former Woman of Steel, sidelined by a knee injury. Despite these setbacks, the Valkyrie have shown incredible resilience, led by the industrious Lindsay Anfield. Anfield's strategic use of 2024 Women of Steel nominee Georgie Hetherington, in a dual full-back and hooker role, has added an exciting layer to what promises to be an enthralling contest.

Before the Grand Final, we kick off with the promotion play-off final. Featherstone Rovers, who finished 8th in the Super League, face the Championship North winners, Leigh Leopards, who earned their place here today by beating the Southern champions London Broncos in a thriller in Birmingham last weekend. Featherstone, one of the first clubs to embrace Women's Rugby League, will battle it out with Leigh, with the winner securing a spot in the Super League for the 2025 season—so the stakes couldn't be higher.

This year marks the first time we've implemented a new structure, as we enter Phase 3 of our long-term strategy with a completed national pyramid. The National Championship is the culmination of winners from the Northern, Midlands, and Southern regions, showcasing that Women's Rugby League now has activity in nearly every corner of the country.

While there's still much work to be done to achieve our collective goals, there are plenty of positive signs. This year, we've seen a 23% increase in women's and girls' teams, and a staggering 240% growth since 2017. One area of growth is the Barrow Raiders, led by Amanda Wilkinson, a Coach of the Year nominee and the first female to achieve the RFL's Level 4 coaching award, exemplifies the growing influence of women in Rugby League.

However, the most exciting element for me is the young talent nurtured by community clubs which is beginning to make a real impact in the Super League. Wigan Warriors, under the guidance of Denis Betts, who's also nominated for Coach of the Year, have made great strides this season. Players like Eva Hunter and Izzy Rowe, both Young Player of the Year nominees, have been key contributors. Leeds Rhinos have similarly impressed, with emerging talents like Bella Sykes and Lucy Murray making significant contributions, both Young Player of the Year and Woman of Steel nominees respectively.

The future of Women's Rugby League is incredibly bright. Looking ahead to 2025, we're determined to continue the growth and the first Ashes series, launching in Las Vegas in March, is groundbreaking, which helps to us increase the profile of the sport and build an owned audience. However, not before we see England take on Wales on Saturday 2nd November at AMT Headingley stadium - with live coverage on the BBC.

Thomas Brindle
General Manager of the Betfred Women's Super League

PROMOTION PLAY-OFF FINAL

Featherstone Rovers v Leigh Leopards – **2pm KO**

Referee: Luke Bland

Reserve referee: Innes Arnold

Touch Judge 1: Liam Breheny

Touch Judge 2: Rebecca Floyd

Timekeeper: Tony Brown

Match Commissioner: Phil Smith

BETFRED WOMEN'S SUPER LEAGUE GRAND FINAL

St Helens v York Valkyrie – **4.30pm KO**

Referee: Liam Rush

Reserve referee: Adam Williams

Touch Judge 1: Neil Horton

Touch Judge 2: Simeon Quarmby

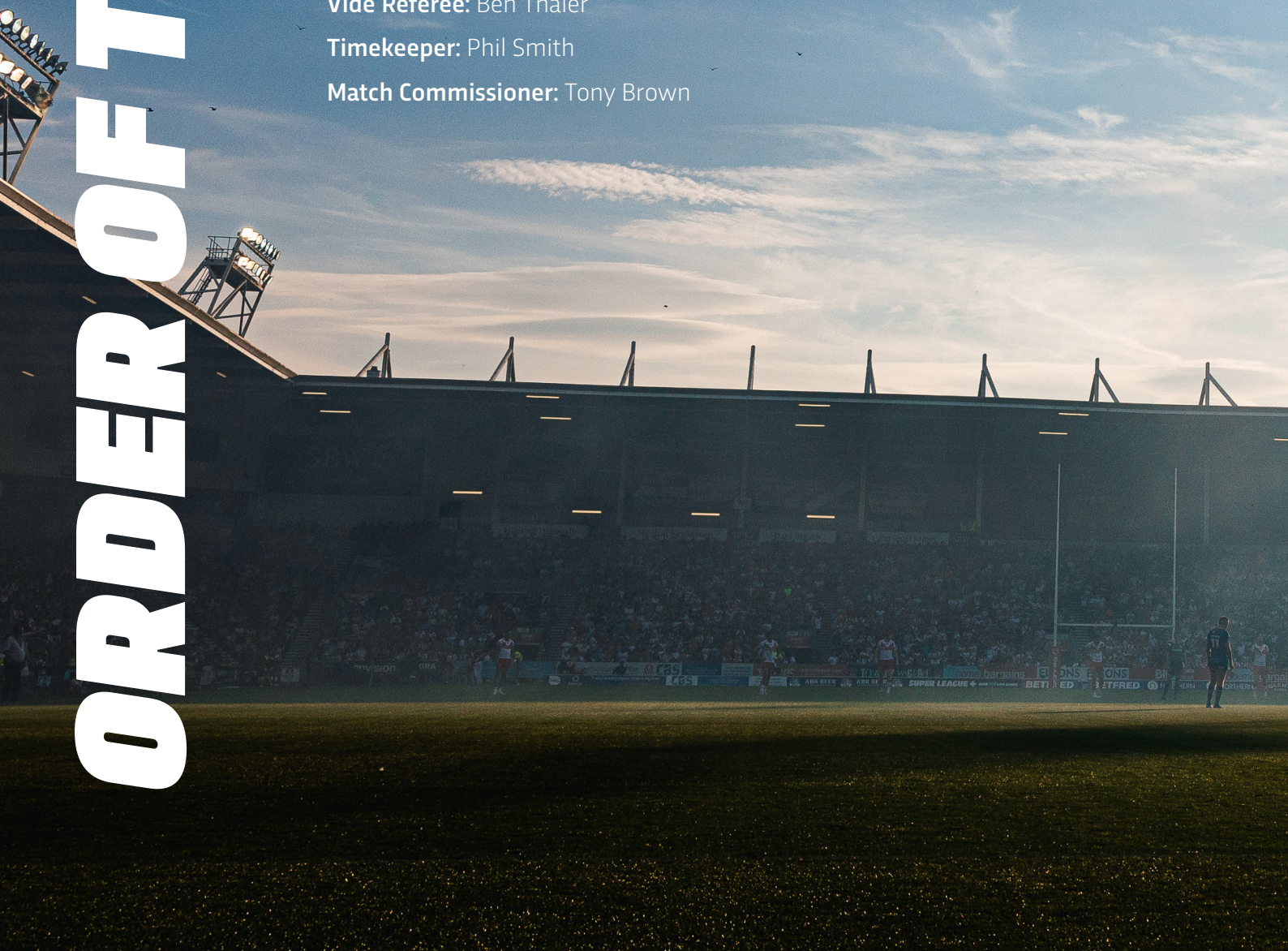
Reserve Touch Judge: Rhiannon Horsman

Vide Referee: Ben Thaler

Timekeeper: Phil Smith

Match Commissioner: Tony Brown

ORDER OF THE DAY





**COURTNEY
WINFIELD-HILL**

COURTNEY WINFIELD-HILL

Earlier this year, the Rugby Football League announced that Courtney Winfield-Hill joined the sport's governing body as Senior Women and Girls' Partner.

Since taking on the role, she has been on a mission to help take the Women's and Girls' game to the next level, not just for this generation but for generations to come.

Courtney's journey through Rugby League is nothing short of remarkable, and her influence on women's sport is undeniable. Originally from Australia, Courtney played Rugby League as a junior for the Monto Roos, while also nurturing a love for cricket. But it was her move to the northern hemisphere in 2017, to join her partner Lauren Winfield-Hill, that prompted a career change in both sport and profession, leading her to both Rugby League and a career in cricket coaching.

Courtney first came to the UK in 2017, intending to stay for only six months. However, a committed relationship with her partner Lauren saw her make England her home. Due to visa restrictions, Courtney was unable to continue playing cricket, which led her to return to her first sporting love—Rugby League. She began her Rugby League journey in 2018, arriving just a week before the season started, watching as Leeds Rhinos took on Bradford Bulls at Odsal Stadium, before being thrust into the starting line-up in round two against Wigan as the starting half-back.

By 2019, she had stepped into the captaincy role for Leeds Rhinos when Lois Forsell, now her coach, suffered a serious injury. While many might highlight her trophy wins and finals appearances as the pinnacle of her career, for Courtney, it's the deep connection she's built with people through Rugby League that stands out. "From being a complete stranger to feeling at home because of Rugby League, that's been my most cherished highlight," she says. Leeds Rhinos became her home away from home, a place where she formed lifelong bonds. What began as a short-term stint has now turned into an ongoing journey well beyond her intended "gap year."

One of the most pivotal moments in Courtney's career came when she became eligible to play for England. Initially, her World Cup 2021 application was declined due to an eligibility rule change, which left her just six months short of the five-year requirement. Devastated, she thought her dream had ended. But with the World Cup postponed due to Covid, the stars aligned, and Courtney finally made her debut for England in 2022, at the age of 35, in a match against France. Despite initial reservations about being "too little and too old," she scored her first try, dispelling her doubts and relishing the underdog role she has always thrived in.

Following the 2022 World Cup, Courtney decided to take a "gap year" from playing Rugby League, holding the door open with a "never say never" attitude. While she may have stepped back from the field, her connection to the sport remained strong. Her new role with the RFL as Senior Women and Girls Partner, alongside work with Sky Sports, has allowed her to stay deeply

connected to Rugby League. One of the highlights of her current role has been coaching on the girls' talent pathways hubs and supporting the next generation of emerging talent. "It's incredible to be surrounded by the girls' passion for the game. It's amazing to see how much confidence they gain, not just in Rugby League, but in themselves." For Courtney, watching these young talents rise through the ranks and even into the Super League is a point of pride. She loves seeing the standard of youth Rugby League accelerate and feels privileged to play a part in their journey.

Reflecting on her own career, Courtney admits that she left Rugby League as a junior because there wasn't a pathway for girls and women at the time. Now, she's proud to see the opportunities available and to be a part of building that structure for future generations. The celebration of Women's Rugby League, and the broader reach it now enjoys, is something Courtney is particularly passionate about. She notes how important it is to create space for women and girls in the sport, with platforms like the Women's Grand Final showcasing their incredible talents.

Courtney is also keen to highlight the importance of role models in the game. She talks about how inspiring it is to see so many women remain within the Women's Super League in coaching or playing roles, even while balancing family commitments. It's a beautiful shift from the past when women often stepped away from the sport after becoming mothers. Today, they feel empowered to return to playing or coaching, and it's a new norm that Courtney hopes will inspire all women within the game.

Courtney Winfield-Hill's journey is a testament to resilience, passion, and the power of sport to create community and inspire future generations. As she continues her work with the RFL and nurtures the next wave of talent, her legacy in Rugby League and women's sport only grows stronger.

PREVIEW

The Betfred Women's Super League comes to a dramatic conclusion today when regular season League Leaders St Helens take on reigning champions York Valkyrie here at the Totally Wicked Stadium.

Today's game is the first time the two sides have met in a Super League Grand Final with Saints looking to avenge two semi-final defeats against their opponents in 2023 and 2022.

The Red V made the final with an 18-4 victory over fierce rivals Wigan Warriors, while York defeated Leeds Rhinos 12-10 in a tight semi-final clash to book their spot.

It is fair to say that St Helens are the team to beat this year as they look to finish the season with a historic treble.

Matty Smith's side already have the League Leaders' Shield and Challenge Cup wrapped up in their trophy cabinet and today, find themselves back in the Grand Final for the first time since 2021, when they won 28-0 against the Rhinos and did the treble. They will be hoping for a history-repeating moment in 2024.

The Valkyrie ran out as 16-6 winners in last year's final against the Rhinos on home territory at the LNER Community Stadium, and are hoping to go back-to-back.

Lindsay Anfield's side have dealt with several injuries this year but look to be hitting form at the right time and after suffering a narrow 10-6 defeat to the Saints in the league back in July, will be looking for revenge in the biggest of events.

When their forward packs clash there are sure to be fireworks and the Valkyrie's raft of experience plus pure power will be a tough act to match.

**St. Helens
R.F.C.**

- 1** BERI **SALIHI**
- 3** LUCI **MCCOLM**
- 4** ERIN **STOTT**
- 5** LEAH **BURKE**
- 6** ZOE **HARRIS**
- 7** FAYE **GASKIN**
- 8** VICKY **WHITFIELD**
- 9** TARA **JONES**
- 10** CHANTELE **CROWL**
- 11** PAIGE **TRAVIS**
- 12** EMILY **RUDGE**
- 13** JODIE **CUNNINGHAM**
- 14** NAOMI **WILLIAMS**
- 16** DARCY **STOTT**
- 17** PIP **BIRCHALL**
- 19** KATIE **MOTTERSHEAD**
- 20** PHOEBE **HOOK**
- 21** AMY **TAYLOR**
- 22** MEGAN **WILLIAMS**
- 24** GEORGIA **SUTHERLAND**
- 30** RACHAEL **WOOSEY**



ST HELENS

SQUAD

YORK WALKYRIE

- 2** EBONI **PARTINGTON**
- 3** TAMZIN **RENOUF**
- 5** GEORGIE **HETHERINGTON**
- 6** SADE **RIHARI**
- 8** LIV **WOOD**
- 10** JAS **BELL**
- 11** LACEY **OWEN**
- 12** SAVANNAH **ANDRADE**
- 13** RHIANNION **MARSHALL**
- 15** KELSEY **GENTLES**
- 18** JESS **SHARP**
- 20** ALEX **STIMPSON**
- 21** LUCY **EASTWOOD**
- 22** EVA **IZUMI**
- 23** MANUQALO **KOMAITAI**
- 26** CARRIE **ROBERTS**
- 28** REMI **WILTON**
- 29** IZZY **BRENNAN**
- 32** LAURAN **EXLEY**
- 33** MEGAN **PAKULIS**
- 36** LISA **PARKER**



SQUAD

NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP FINAL



**NATIONAL WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP
WINNERS 2022**

Earlier this year, the Rugby Football League introduced the national pyramid into the women's game. This allowed teams from the southern competition for the first time to compete for promotion into the Betfred Women's Super League.

The new structure is part of a long-term vision to create a national pyramid for Women's Rugby League. The Betfred Women's Super League sits at the top of the pyramid and the regionalised Championship below. The winners of the Northern and Southern Championships go head-to-head in a bid to be crowned National Champions and earn the right to compete for promotion to the Betfred Women's Super League.

This year it was Leigh Leopards and London Broncos who made history as they competed at Alexander Stadium, Birmingham – with a place at today's Finals Day on the line, and the chance to take on Featherstone Rovers for a place in next year's BWSL.

The fixture was action-packed and highly competitive, with the Leopards claiming the title with a hard-fought 22-18 win. Despite a slow start and a first half dominated by a physical and determined London side, Leigh's resilience saw them lift the trophy and solidify their place as champions.

NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP FINAL

The Leopards storm Northern Women's Championship

The Northern Women's Championship kicked off in March with one club dominating the league this season – Leigh Leopards.

The Leopards missed out on promotion to the Betfred Women's Super League at the end of last season but started their campaign in blistering form having scored 240 points after the first two months.

The record books were re-written during their game against Castleford Tigers in Round 5 with Leigh bagging a club record score and Charlotte Melvin setting new goals and points records for their Women's team.

Their success continued throughout the year with Kieron Purtill's side finishing the regular season in first after winning all of their games.

Hot on their heels were Sheffield Eagles – spearheaded by RFL Roll of Honour inductee Andrea Dobson – who have made rapid progression since forming in 2021.

The Eagles ended the regular season on 24 points and secured a dominant victory over Salford Red Devils in the semi-finals to set up a Northern Women's Championship Final against Leigh at Twist Lane.

It was the hosts who claimed the title following an impressive 46-6 victory over Sheffield. Despite heavy rain and a slippery ball, Leigh dominated the fixture, sealing their place in the National Championship Final against London Broncos.

London calling once again in the Southern Women's Championship

Women's Rugby League continues to thrive in the South and 2024 has been no different with three separate competitions serving up plenty of action.

Leading the way is the Southern Women's Championship which culminated in another blockbuster Grand Final between Cardiff Demons and London Broncos.

Both teams had beaten each other at home during the regular season with London taking first place at the end of the regular season.

The Broncos had pulled off a stunning 22-10 win over Cardiff in the 2023 Grand Final to end their two-year grip on the competition and Colin Baker's side were victorious once again in 2024.

They stormed to a 28-8 Grand Final win in Wales with Emily Bell, Nicole Kennedy and Jazz Rampton all crossing on the day which set them on their way to the National Championship Grand Final.

And in a sign of the progress being made in the South, the region was split into East and West groups to accommodate the growing number of teams in Tier 3.

In the Southern West League 1 competition, teams participated in a series of festivals taking place at Brighton & Hove, London Broncos and Bristol Golden Ferns. The Eastern competition was also a series of centralised events – with the Final taking place at Thurrock, with a combined North Herts Crusaders and Thurrock team coming away victorious. Anglian Vipers finished as runners-up, with Brentwood Eels and Bedford Tigers also involved.

MY WHY

JODIE CUNNINGHAM

Have you ever wondered what is YOUR WHY?

Saints captain Jodie Cunningham sat down to tell us 'her why' for playing the greatest game, and discusses this year's campaign ahead of the Betfred Women's Super League Grand Final on Saturday 6 October, when St Helens face York Valkyrie.

"This year we wanted to focus on 'My Why.' It's really personal to each individual and it's what everyone's reasons are for why they do what they do, why they work so hard, why they play the game and why it means so much to them," Cunningham explained.

"My Why' is all about little girls that are inspired to play because of what we do.

"It's something I never had. I never had any women that I knew playing the game. I couldn't name you one woman who played when I started playing Rugby League and now we've got hundreds and hundreds of young girls that are showing up to the games now with our names on the back, desperate for photographs and of things to be signed and saying how much we've inspired them. And I think that's such a powerful thing that we mustn't take for granted.

"It's a huge responsibility, but it's why I keep going. That's my why when things get tough – and I think about these little girls whose dreams you're helping to make come true.

"It means the world for me to play in finals and to have all these trophies. Of course it does. But for me, making it even better for the next generation is massive, and hopefully when I'm retired these finals will be even better than they have been before, because of the work we're doing now."

This year the St Helens and York Valkyrie players will each select a young girl or person who is special to

them, to be their game day mascot at the 2024 Grand Final. With both the platform and profile to empower the next generation, Cunningham recognised the importance of holding such a position:

"I've had quite a few young girls and families getting in touch to say how much of an inspiration I've been – especially in these past few seasons in Women's Super League when we've had more profile," said Cunningham.

"For me, my mascot this year is a young girl called Nalani. She is going to be my why in this year's Grand Final.

"Nalani doesn't play Rugby League herself, but her dad is a big Saints fan and Nalani didn't like that her dad was going to games on his own.

"She wasn't into rugby at first, but just wanted to go with her dad to keep him company. But she didn't really like going to the men's games, so her dad suggested trying out one of the women's games instead.

"They came to watch us play and Nalani couldn't believe that women or girls played Rugby League. It shows those stereotypes are still there even in the really young generations.

"The impact was powerful. Her dad is really open minded and yet still his little daughter was thinking that girls couldn't play a sport like Rugby League, and she's since fallen in love with it. And it's something that they do together.

"Nalani and her dad Dave come to all the games. Her last name is actually 'Cunningham.' There's no relation or connection, but I think that's why I've become her favourite player because she could see herself in the Red V and we obviously have the same names – she has the name 'Cunningham' on her back.

MY WAY

"She's amazing and she's actually a really committed dancer, and we all talked a lot about what we do in terms of inspiring her to work hard and be resilient in her dancing.

"She sees that on the pitch for us. So even though she doesn't play, she's inspired by what we do and how we're strong - women who are breaking down stereotypes. Her dad thinks that's really important for her to see as a young girl."

Nalani's dad, Dave, commented: "For Nalani, the resilience and determination is what will take her towards her dream. She looks at the hard work the Saints girls put in to get where they are and she knows she needs to do the same.

"As much as I say to her that she can achieve anything she puts her mind to with hard work and determination, it is something else to see it in action. That's where Jodie and the girls come in.

"While Nalani doesn't play rugby, the example the women set are no less important and the lessons are transferable in any walk of life. Seeing other 'girls' going out and competing the way they do shows that you can do it and achieve whatever you want if you just keep going. I would just like to say thank you to them all for setting an incredible example."

Cunningham added: "It's amazing for girls who even aren't playing. We're inspiring in different ways.

"You don't have to play to enjoy watching Women's Super League to have role models and heroes in the game. It's really nice that Nalani can look up to myself and the rest of the girls and use that to channel into her dancing."

And as St Helens' Head of Pathways, Cunningham has become an iconic figure in the growth of Women's & Girls Rugby League, and an incredible ambassador for both her club and the wider sport as a whole.

As a trailblazer and inspiration for more young players, especially young girls to participate in Rugby League, she said:

"I've always had such a strong belief in the potential of Women and Girls Rugby League. Not everyone's seen it, but people are starting to - and that's really special.

"I think it's felt like a one-man band at times years ago and it was always met with negativity around the quality or whether it was even worth people's time and investment. That was hard to take when it was your life and it was everything you cared about.

"From the minute I picked up a ball at 12-years-old it became my life, and I just couldn't imagine doing anything but this. I just loved it. It was a top priority above all else. So then when people can't see the value in that, it can be frustrating at times.

"But now, the Women's Super League gets women out there and people are admiring us for the athletes we are, the people we are and what we deliver on pitch.

"People are really starting to get behind what we deliver as a product - the girls just need a chance to be exposed to Rugby League to actually fall in love with it.

"I wasn't a rugby person, I didn't watch Rugby League and my family didn't play so if it wasn't for my friends forcing me - I would've never have got involved in Rugby League in any way.

"But or as soon as I did, I fell in love with it and was in it for life.

"I think for me what's important is that we give young girls the chance to do that because it's always been excluded for women and girls in a lot of ways. And actually, in the last 5-6 years it's really opened Rugby League up to a new audience and ways of getting involved, not just as players.

"It's about inspiring the next generation. It's a way of parents, it's way of dads, daughters, mums, daughters, connecting in a different way and coming down to what is a really family friendly environment.

"It's really important that we keep exposing our women's game.

"Young girls have got chances which they have never had before. They can see genuine role models that they can go and be, and they can go down to stadiums and experience it as a fan. And nowadays, there are all these routes and paths where you can get involved playing or coaching - and young girls wanting and aspiring to be in the media or work in the sport is really important as well.

"I think that Women's Super League is providing that opportunity in loads of ways to shine a light on how accessible it is and how much of a place women and girls can and should have in our sport."

SADE RIHARI

My Why | Sade Rihari (youtube.com)

Sade Rihari of York Valkyrie sat down to tell us her emotional 'why' for playing the greatest game, and her chosen mascot ahead of the Betfred Women's Super League Grand Final when her side travel to play St Helens.



MY WHY



Charley Blackburn, Featherstone Rovers:

"To the little girl that dreamed of playing for her hometown club, all the work you put in from 13 years old will pay off, but it doesn't stop there. You will meet some of your best friends through Rugby League and get the pleasure to play with and against some of the best in the world. To the little girl who used to sit in the stands and be in awe of the Featherstone girls playing in front of you, you'll get your chance to do something you dreamed of and that's play alongside them.

"Don't stop striving, because the drive you have never fails. Playing Rugby League will be the best decision you ever make."

Chantelle Crowl, St Helens:

"Work hard and dreams will come true."

Megan Pakulis, York Valkyrie:

"Find your 'Why'. Learn what gets you motivated to lace up the boots and use it to propel you forward in every opportunity that comes your way, never taking these experiences for granted. Appreciate each moment you get to step out on the field with your teammates as these are going to be some of the best times of your life."

Storm Cobain, Leigh Leopards:

"It's all paid off. The long hours of travelling, the hours of training, skipping time with friends. It's all been worth it. You've made some difficult decisions along the way, but ultimately, they've all worked out and now you are stronger, braver, loved and supported more than you ever could have imagined. Keep making your family proud!"

Zoe Harris, St Helens:

"Believe and you can achieve."

Tamzin Renouf, York Valkyrie:

"To my younger self, believe in yourself, work hard and all your dreams and more will come true- you've got this."

Natalie Carr, Featherstone Rovers:

"I would tell my younger self, Don't lose that fire in your belly, fight for what you want, even if people tell you, you won't make it, because you'll get where you want to be."

Becky Greenfield, Leigh Leopards:

"Dear younger Becky,
Appreciate having your Dad supporting you at every training session and game striving to make you a better player and achieve your goals. Don't let anyone ever tell you you're not good enough because you are! Stand up for yourself and belief in your abilities, know your worth! Make sure you enjoy playing because that's why you play the sport!
Lots of love,
Older Becky"

HEAD TO HEAD

ST HELENS v YORK VALKYRIE

St Helens - Previous Grand Finals:

2021 Won (v Leeds, 28-0) (at Headingley)

York - Previous Grand Finals:

2023 Won (v Leeds, 16-6) (at LNER Community Stadium)

2022 Lost (v Leeds, 12-4) (at Headingley)

Last ten meetings:

St Helens 10, York 6 (SLR6, 31/7/24)

St Helens 32, York 2 (CCSF, 18/5/24)
(at Eco-Power Stadium, Doncaster)

York 20, St Helens 16 (SLR1, 2¹/₄/24)

St Helens 8, York 18 (SL-G1, 28/7/23)

St Helens 17, York 16 (CCSF, 22/7/23)
(at Halliwell Jones Stadium, Warrington)

York 26, St Helens 6 (SL-G1, 16/4/23)

St Helens 12, York 4 (SL-G1, 31/7/22)

York 13, St Helens 6 (SL-G1, 22/5/22)

St Helens 32, York 0 (SL-PO, 22/8/21)

York 24, St Helens 0 (SL, 20/6/21)

Previous Final meetings:

(St Helens won 1, York won 0)

Challenge Cup Final

2021 St Helens 34, York 6 (at Leigh Sports Village)

WOMEN'S CHANNELS

The introduction of a dedicated space for Women's Rugby League on Instagram and TikTok

Earlier this year, the Rugby Football League launched two brand new social channels dedicated to the Women's game – including the world's first TikTok account run exclusively by players.

Both channels have been created in consultation with Rugby League's strategic partner IMG as the organisations continue to reimagine the sport in the UK. They mark the latest stage in the sport's digital transformation, following the launch of its global streaming service, SuperLeague+, and Fantasy Gaming with Voono.

Since its launch both channels have thrived spotlighting the outstanding talent that Women's and Girls' Rugby League has to offer.

The feature of TikTok has been the authenticity of the players, reaching thousands of people with each video. The TikTok channel empowers the players to directly engage with their supporters, share their personal journeys and of course their entertaining personalities! It represents a groundbreaking step towards building stars out of our athletes and fostering a deeper connection with the Rugby League community.

The Instagram aims to showcase the vibrant community, the intense action on the field and the stories that go beyond the 80 minutes. It serves as a hub for fans to stay updated with the latest news from community level all the way up to the Women's Super League.

We encourage everyone to follow these channels to extend your fix of the best Women's Rugby League has to offer!

@womensrugbyleague on Instagram and TikTok.

AWARDS

Nominees for Betfred Women's Super League Awards confirmed

There will be a new name on the Woman of Steel trophy this year with three players who have never won the most prestigious individual honour in Women's Rugby League shortlisted for 2024 (listed below in alphabetical order).

St Helens scrum-half Faye Gaskin has been recognised in what's set to be her final season for the Red V. The 32-year-old opened the scoring for Saints at Wembley Stadium earlier this season and has been playing some of her best rugby after overcoming a serious knee injury that saw her sidelined in 2021 for two years.

Georgie Hetherington is shortlisted for the first time following a standout season for York Valkyrie in the absence of their captain and last year's Woman of Steel, Sinead Peach. Hetherington enjoyed a dream England debut in June as she registered a try and an assist against France in the Mid-Season international.

21-year-old Lucy Murray is the youngest player in contention this year – the second rower has become a regular for Leeds Rhinos since her debut back in 2021 and was recently named their Women's Player of the Year.

The 2024 Woman of Steel will be crowned at Rugby League's biggest and most inclusive Awards Night at the Royal Armouries, Leeds on Tuesday 8 October – two days after the Betfred Women's Super League Grand Final.

Shortlists for the two additional Women's awards that will be announced that night have also been confirmed today – Coach of the Year and Young Player of the Year.

Amanda Wilkinson of Barrow Raiders and Wigan Warriors Denis Betts have both been shortlisted for Coach of the Year. Both coaches have reinvigorated their teams in 2024 with Barrow ending their first season in the top flight in fifth and Wigan squeezing the gap to the top three to just four points and lifting the Women's Nines trophy.

The third contender is Matty Smith, a former men's Grand Final and Challenge Cup winner as a player with Wigan, who has steered them to back-to-back victories in the Women's Challenge Cup Final at Wembley as well as lifting the 2024 League Leaders' Shield.

Criteria for the BWSL Young Player of the Year are slightly different to the men's equivalent, as only players who were 19 and younger at the start of 2024 are considered, recognising the younger average age of players in the Women's game.

The three contenders are Wigan duo Isabel Rowe and Eva Hunter and Leeds middle Bella Sykes.

The Woman of Steel voting panel consists of Women's Rugby League experts and evangelists Tanya Arnold, Jenna Brooks, Lorraine Marsden and Danika Priim 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.

RUGBY LEAGUE HALL OF FAME

Ashes-winning Great Britain Women's team to be inducted into Rugby League Hall of Fame

The last senior British team to complete an Ashes series victory over Australia are to be recognised by becoming the first team to be inducted into the Rugby League Hall of Fame.

The 1996 Great Britain Lionesses were the first women's team to tour Australia and made an indelible impact on Rugby League history by winning six of their seven games Down Under, including the second and third Test matches against Australia.

Their achievement was all the more remarkable given the obstacles they faced simply to make the tour happen: women's Rugby League was not recognised or supported by the RFL in the UK in 1996 and the players had to self-fund the entire trip.

On arriving in Australia, the tourists received little assistance from their hosts and had to arrange their own accommodation, transport and training facilities during their three-week trip.

Despite those hurdles, and a gruelling schedule, the Lionesses rose to the challenge in magnificent style: victories over a Sydney Select XIII (86-0) and Australian Capital Territories (36-0) were followed by their only defeat, a narrow 16-14 loss in the first Test in Canberra.

They returned to winning ways three days later with a 22-8 win against Queensland in Brisbane and followed that up with a series-levelling 18-12 success in the second Test at the same venue.

The Lionesses then defeated a President's Select XIII 30-0 and wrapped up their historic tour – and the Ashes series – by completing a famous 20-18 win in the third Test decider at the Redfern Oval in Sydney.

The tour squad comprised 26 players and four members of staff, including head coach Ian Harris and his assistant, Jackie Sheldon.

RFL Chief Executive Tony Sutton said: "When introducing a new Teams category into the Hall of Fame we wanted to set a very high bar for entry and there can be no doubt that the Great Britain Women's tour team of 1996 meet that bar.

"What they achieved with so little backing, both at home or in Australia, is simply outstanding and a huge credit to the quality of everyone involved.

"Thankfully, Women's and Girls' Rugby League now gets the recognition and support it so richly deserves and the many thousands of female players we have in the game owe a great debt to these pioneering legends."

Of the 26 players on the 1996 Lionesses tour, five have been elevated into the Rugby League Hall of Fame – Brenda Dobek, Lisa McIntosh and Sally Milburn, who were the first three women inducted in 2022; and Jane Banks and Michelle Land, who will take their place in the sport's most exclusive and prestigious club at the 2024 Hall of Fame induction dinner hosted by Rugby League Cares at The Edge, Wigan, on Tuesday October 22.

RAIDERS RETURN

Barrow Raiders celebrate return to top flight

Barrow Raiders made a triumphant debut in the Betfred Women's Super League this season with Amanda Wilkinson leading her side to an impressive fifth placed finish.

They earned a place in top flight after producing a sensational performance in the 2023 Promotion Final where they came from behind to clinch a 14-8 victory over Leigh Leopards.

And after a hugely successful year, two key pillars of that promotion winning side have announced they will be hanging up their boots at the end of the season.

Captain Jodie Litherland played a major role in the Raiders' first season in the BWSL, appearing in every game in both league and cup this season.

In fact, Litherland retires having played 62 consecutive games since the town's female rugby league team moved under the banner of Barrow Raiders. In total, she scored 380 points for the club.

Another key member of that squad, Michelle Larkin, has also announced she will be stepping down - she played a further 13 games in the club's debut season in the BWSL, adding three tries to her tally.

One of those tries saw her name added to the Raiders history books, with Larkin scoring the club's first-ever try in the Super League against Wigan Warriors back in April.

At the age of 45, the outside back holds the proud record of being the oldest player to have ever featured in the Betfred Women's Super League.

On stepping away from the sport, Litherland said: "In my whole 30 years of playing sport since I was six years old, nothing has ever made me prouder than pulling on the Raiders jersey and captaining my hometown club in the top flight of the women's game.

"There are friendships I have made that I will cherish forever, and I hope I have been part of a journey to put Barrow on the map and pave the way for future stars who can play for Barrow at the highest level."

On her decision to step away from the game, Larkin said: "I feel so privileged and proud to have been part of this team from the beginning.

"Any challenges faced along the way have been met front-on, with the help of the amazing coaches and staff, and of course my team-mates, who will be friends for life.

"The club has been so supportive from the moment we started our journey to the Super League, helping in any way they could.

"The future of female rugby league in Barrow is bright. The number of girls coming through is growing every year, and I hope that I have played a small part in inspiring more young women to play rugby league.

"Finishing fifth in the Super League and scoring the first try at this level for the club is so special, and I couldn't ask for a more perfect time to hang up my boots and reflect on the journey I've taken."



WE'RE ON THE SAME TEAM

Jodie Cunningham, St Helens star, England Rugby League icon and 'We're On The Same Team' inspiring ambassador.

Jodie Cunningham was announced this year as an ambassador for the 'We're On The Same Team' project in partnership with the RFL and Community Integrated Care. The Rugby League star has been a crucial part of the partnership from the start, where she began working closely with Community Integrated Care during the Rugby League World Cup in 2021.

Jodie expressed: "Working with Community Integrated Care is really special for me. I was there right at the start of the partnership with the Rugby League World Cup, and to see projects being delivered over the years, and being able to meet with the inclusive volunteers and develop friendships has been fantastic. It's great when you talk about it in theory, but when you get to meet the individuals who are part of it, you see how important this is, and special the work the charity is doing across our communities."

'We're On The Same Team' provides engaging and impactful education aimed at helping young people understand the influence of their words and actions on others. The program emphasises the importance of unity and mutual respect, demonstrating how we all thrive when we're on the same team and ultimately will help tackle bullying.

The campaign leverages the powerful stories of Rugby League role models and players from the Community Integrated Care Learning Disability Super League to reinforce its key messages. Jodie along with four other Rugby League stars serve as proud advocates, helping to raise awareness about the damaging effects of stereotyping and bullying. Their involvement will be instrumental in fostering a more inclusive and understanding community.

ORIGIN CLASH

BOUNDARY PARK TO HOST WOMEN'S ORIGIN CLASH

The best of the Betfred Women's Super League (BWSL) will face off at Boundary Park in Oldham on Saturday 19 October (KO 2pm).

England Women Head Coach, Stuart Barrow, will select squads representing Lancashire and Yorkshire following the conclusion of the BWSL with regional training sessions taking place on Wednesday 16 October.

The event on October 19 is set to be a full celebration of the Women and Girls' game with the first ever female coaching conference taking place at the venue earlier that day with 50 attendees from across the community and professional game set to attend. All 50 participants will then head out to the stands to watch what's sure to be an intense game that will be played under modified rules.

England Women Head Coach, Stuart Barrow, said: "We've had another fantastic season in the Betfred Women's Super League, and today's final is too close to call which is a testament to the quality of Rugby League on show in the competition.

"Our fixture at Boundary Park will be a great way for the best players from the Super League to come together and showcase their skill and talent whilst representing either Lancashire or Yorkshire. Whilst many of those players will be part of either the England Senior or Knights squad, we could also see some new names involved for this one-off fixture.

"Our game against Wales is on the horizon and following their World Cup qualification earlier this year, we know they will be a tough team to beat, so October 19 will also serve as an important warm-up for the game at AMT Headingley."

RFL Head of Education, Dave Elliot, explained: "We are really looking forward to hosting the first Women's Coaching Conference before the War of the Roses clash. We have speakers attending who will be able to share invaluable insight and knowledge with the coaches in attendance and we hope that they are able to implement this into their own sessions.

"As the women's game continues to grow, we feel it is important that not only do we offer support and learning opportunities to our players, but also to the coaches who are with them week in and week out."

Entrance to Boundary Park on Saturday 19 October will be free with parking and access available from 1.30pm.

ENGLAND WOMEN

All three England teams will be in action this Autumn as part of the ABK Beer International Test Series with England Women set to face Wales at AMT Headingley Stadium on Saturday 2 November (KO 12pm).

England celebrated a 60-0 victory against their opponents in 2023 – but following Wales' qualification to the 2026 Rugby League World Cup, Stuart Barrow's side will be in for a tougher ride come November.

Last time out, Amy Hardcastle got the breakthrough with a double, before Shona Hoyle barged over from close range after a Jodie Cunningham offload.

Hardcastle was involved again before the break, with Caitlin Beevers, Tara Jane Stanley, Lacey Owen, Georgia Roche, Tamzin Renouf, Keara Bennett and Emily Rudge also on the scoresheet that day.

November's fixture will be the final game England Women play before a historic Ashes series against Australia in 2025 – including a Women's international against the Jillaroos in Las Vegas in March.

The match will be staged at the 65,000-capacity Allegiant Stadium, home of the Las Vegas Raiders and venue for the 2024 NFL Superbowl – where more than 40,000 attended the NRL's first Vegas promotion earlier this year.

The highly anticipated clash will be the first time the two national teams have faced each other since the 2017 World Cup, a match that saw the dominant Jillaroos secure a resounding 38-0 victory over England. However, with the English side having made significant strides in the past seven years, this neutral-ground showdown promises to be a thrilling test of their development and ability to challenge the world champions.

The opportunity for England to take on the Australians on such a prominent stage in Las Vegas is a momentous occasion. It will not only showcase the talents of the English squad but also serve as a significant step forward in the growth and recognition of Women's Rugby League on the global stage.

WALES WOMEN

Wales Women will once again make the journey to AMT Headingley to face England this Autumn.

This will be the fourth clash between the two nations with the two sides meeting at the same venue last November.

Wales have had another historic year having qualified for the 2026 Rugby League World Cup at the first time of asking after beating the Netherlands 48-6 earlier this year in Amsterdam.

Wales needed to avoid a 12-point defeat to win the group and qualify but they did more than that as they got the victory, scoring 11 tries against a determined Dutch outfit to reach their very first World Cup.

In scorching heat in front of a healthy crowd, Wales made the perfect start with fullback Leanne Burnell crossing in the opening minute but the hosts dominated the opening quarter without being able to score.

When Wales went back onto the attack again, they scored. Brittony Price receiving to ground in the corner but Davies couldn't convert and Wales were 8-0 up.

Soon after that, it was 12-0. Seren Gough-Walters, in her first Wales game for two years due to injury, finishing off another nice move.

Just before half-time, Gough-Walters crossed again and the Dragons were now cruising. Kathryn Salter landed the kick and the visitors were 18-0 up going into the break.

Just a dropped ball prevented Wales from making it 22 within two minutes of the second half starting, but as soon as Wales regained the ball, those points were point on the board, Salter diving from close range with Davies unable to convert.

Price looked for her second try after Salter set her up, but the Dutch weren't giving in that easily and she was pulled into touch. But the Welsh weren't to be denied their sixth try of the game. Agnes Wood broke through for her first try for Wales which Salter improved.

The seventh try arrived on 56 minutes when Gough-Walters completed her hat-trick. Salter couldn't convert but Wales were 32-0 up.

Burnell scored under the sticks for her second try, converting it herself, then Hannah Jones quickly followed up with Wales' ninth try that went unconverted.

And it was left for skipper Bethan Dainton to cement them in by running in the final try of the game with Burnell's conversion this final touch of the match.

Speaking to press after the game, Salter said:

"I could never have dreamt, when the journey started, that we would be here qualifying for a World Cup. Everyone played for each other, and it was a great win. The team has grown, there is competition for places, and everyone knows their role and wants to do better which has improved us as a squad."