



BIRMINGHAM CITY FOOTBALL CLUB

# 2024/25 REVIEW OF THE YEAR

CHAPTER 2. THE COMEBACK AND TRANSFORMATION





# CONTENTS

## 1. INTRODUCTION

IT'S NOT THE LEAGUE YOU ARE IN, IT'S THE CLUB YOU ARE

## 2. THE BLUE THREAD

THE KEY MOMENTS FROM THE LAST 12 MONTHS

## 3. FROM THE CEO

JEREMY DALE ON 2024/25

## 4. RECORD BREAKERS

KEY RECORDS SET AND STATS FROM A REMARKABLE 2024/25 SEASON FOR THE MEN'S TEAM

## 5. MAKING HISTORY

A CONVERSATION WITH CHRIS DAVIES

## 6. POSITIVE STRIDES FORWARD

A CONVERSATION WITH AMY MERRICKS

## 7. THE SPORTS QUARTER

A DEFINING MOMENT

## 8. BLUES ACADEMY

1. THE DRIVE TO CATEGORY ONE STATUS

2. WHAT IS A CATEGORY ONE ACADEMY?

3. A CONVERSATION WITH ACADEMY TECHNICAL DIRECTOR MIKE RIGG

4. WOMEN'S PGA SUCCESS, ACADEMY HIGHLIGHTS

## 9. INFRASTRUCTURE

INFRASTRUCTURE, TRANSFORMATION & HIGH PERFORMANCE WITH NICK SMITH

## 10. COMMERCIAL AND PARTNERSHIPS

MARQUEE NAMES AND INNOVATION WITH JOSH DAVIS & MARTIN HEALY

## 11. THE FOUNDATION

MORE THAN FOOTBALL

## 12. THE RISE AND RISE OF THE OFFICIAL SUPPORTERS CLUB

A YEAR OF GROWTH AT HOME AND AROUND THE GLOBE

## 13. LEGENDS RETIRE

LUKAS JUTKIEWICZ AND LOUISE QUINN HANG UP THEIR BOOTS

## 14. CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

TOM WAGNER





# IT'S NOT THE LEAGUE YOU ARE IN, IT'S THE CLUB YOU ARE

This season will go down in history. Birmingham City did not let the Men's team's relegation to League One affect us or define us.

Moreover, it spurred the Club, through the unwavering commitment and ambition of owners Knighthead, to betterment.

In 2024/25 our standards, processes and professionalism were taken to another level as we strive to be recognised as a beacon of excellence worldwide.

This manifested itself in tangible results and significant improvement and growth, on and off the pitch.

In this, our second Annual Review, we talk to key Club personnel, the leaders, who share their stories and insight into all that happened during the season and outline just how Blues are evolving.

Our Men's team produced a record-breaking season in winning the title and promotion. The statistics alone behind this success are staggering. Chris Davies gives us his fascinating lowdown.

Unfortunately, our Women fell agonisingly at the final hurdle, in the last few minutes of the season, and were pipped to the championship and promotion. However, much has been put into place to help restore our Women's side to where they should be, amongst the leading lights of the game. We feel this is only a matter of time – and Amy Merricks is of the same opinion.

Our supporters were immense, coming in their droves to back both teams and help create a positive, feelgood factor.

Our waiting list for Men's season tickets for the coming campaign hit close to an unprecedented 15,000.

Our supporters recognise the exciting journey we are on and, tellingly, so do the new, blue chip commercial partners who came on board with us this year.

There have been major investments in all areas of the Club's infrastructure. Read Nick Smith's views in this Annual Review.

We received one of the best ever audit gradings when

granted a Category One Academy licence – Mike Rigg takes us behind the scenes on how it happened.

Our work on enhancing fan experience and engagement has continued with new, exciting initiatives.

The Birmingham City Foundation has again positively influenced the lives of tens of thousands in our local community.

All the while throughout 2024/25, the Club's Chairman Tom Wagner and his colleagues at Knighthead, remained steadfast in their determination to bring to life one of the most exciting projects in world sport and city regeneration - the Sports Quarter.

When Knighthead took over the Club in July 2023, they made six commitments.

These were to ensure supporters were involved at all times; to bring in the best of the best to lead the Club and create a high performance environment; transformation through improved infrastructure and commercial partnerships; to help local talent flourish and realise potential on the pitch and through education for careers in the wider world of sport; to become a cornerstone of the local community and be a force for good for the city.

We have not wavered from any of these promises - and we will continue to honour them as we prepare for next season and beyond.

**Birmingham is on the rise!**





# THE BLUE THREAD

01

Lukas Jutkiewicz extends his Blues stay by signing a new, one-year contract.

02

Rebecca McKenna moves from Charlton Athletic to Blues Women. The Northern Ireland defender pens a two-year deal.

13

Having scored 63 goals in the previous three seasons, prolific goalscorer Alfie May joins for an undisclosed fee from Charlton Athletic.

24

Blues end their pre-season camp in Austria with a loss at the hands of German side Paderborn 07.



25

The inaugural Trevor Francis Memorial Match takes place and Blues defeat one of Trevor's former clubs, Glasgow Rangers, 2-1 in front of 19,000 at St. Andrew's @ Knighthead Park.

Marc Leonard signs for Blues from Brighton & Hove Albion. He becomes Chris Davies' eighth permanent signing of a busy summer.

03

Blues round off their pre-season programme with a 4-1 defeat of West Bromwich Albion at St. Andrew's @ Knighthead Park.

09

Official Supporters Club and Blues join forces to clean up the local community with a 'litter pick'

10

Alfie May's 87th minute penalty salvages a draw for Blues against Reading at home on the opening day of the League One season, in front of 27,985.

12

Former Academy product Jordan James is sold to Rennes, in France.

15

Northern Ireland striker Simone Magill signs for Blues Women, on a two-year contract, after leaving Aston Villa.

30

Blues raid Glasgow to sign Tomoki Iwata from Celtic and Scott Wright from Rangers.

And just before the transfer window slams shut, a stunning Club and divisional record transfer of Jay Stansfield, from Fulham, is announced. Stansfield becomes Blues' 17th incoming transfer under Chris Davies.



03

Blues' Vertu EFL Trophy campaign gets underway in the group stage with a 1-1 draw against Walsall at home, with the Saddlers winning the subsequent penalty shoot-out 4-3.

08

Blues Women make a fantastic start to the WSL Championship season, hammering Sunderland Women 5-0, with Lucy Quinn scoring twice.



14

Ashley Cole leaves his position as First Team Coach to assist Lee Carsley at England.

16

Blues Women sign South Korea international forward Lee Geum-min on a two-year deal from Brighton & Hove Albion.

Blues join forces with Delta Air Lines in a major partnership. The American giant becomes the Club's Official Airline Partner and will help shape Blues' worldwide appeal.



18

Blues sign a new multi-year agreement with Nike, the world's leading designer, marketer and distributor of authentic sporting goods.

Tom Huddlestone leaves Wigan Athletic to become Blues First Team Assistant Coach.



20

Blues announce an extension to its Principal Club Partner and sponsorship agreement with global sportswear brand, UNDEFEATED. The partnership with the leading US-based label will run for a further three years.

28

Blues go top of League One for the first time following a 3-2 defeat of Peterborough United.





# THE BLUE THREAD

07

The Birmingham City Foundation launches a new Community Hub and will be the base for dozens of activities aimed at improving the lives of people in Birmingham.



11

Simone Magill's 84th minute penalty gives Blues Women a 2-1 win at Sheffield United Women, putting them top of the Championship going into the international break.

15

After a string of fine performances, Lucy Quinn is named Women's Championship Player of the Month for September.

OCT

23

Blues sign a four-year agreement with Heineken UK, providing fans with a top-class choice of brands around St. Andrew's @ Knighthead Park.



29

Blues hammer Fulham Under-21s 7-1 at home in the Vertu EFL Trophy, their biggest victory since 1994. It confirms a place in the competition's knockout round of 32.

04

Amy Merricks wins her first manager of the month award, after guiding Blues Women to three wins from three games in October to go top of the Championship.

05

Birmingham City Foundation sets up a new mental health provision: The Birmingham City Foundation Talking Clubs – a weekly group meeting using the power of talking to tackle the stresses and difficulties of everyday life.

10

Blues Women bounce back from a home defeat by Newcastle United by coming out on top in a crunch fixture at London City Lionesses. The result puts Blues three points clear at the summit of the Championship, from Lionesses and Durham Women.

NOV

13

The third Open House event takes place at St. Andrew's @ Knighthead Park. The theme is Growth, detailing the significant growth, investments and advancements that have been made in all areas of the Club.

20

Blues announce that an exciting new hospitality offering is ready to open: 12, located in the Gil Merrick Stand.

23

A shock 3-2 defeat is suffered at Shrewsbury Town, only Blues' second of the season. Thereafter, however, they embark on a remarkable run of form.

04

Blues welcome Vertu Motors as an Official Club Partner on a multi-year strategic agreement. A crucial part of the partnership sees Vertu work together with the Club and Foundation on a range of community programmes.

The Fan Park is open for business! Supporters enjoy the delights of the latest supporter experience, situated on the Main Stand car park, for the first time before and after Blues host Stockport County.

06

There are changes to the Blues Women coaching staff as Emily Simpkins departs as Assistant Head Coach to join Utah Royals in the NWSL.

Jay Bradford announces she is leaving her post as Rangers Women Assistant Manager to link up as Assistant Head Coach to Amy Merricks, alongside August recruit Chelsea Noonan.

DEC

09

Brew With Blues launches at Community Hub. Birmingham City Foundation opens its doors to tackle loneliness on a twice-weekly basis in a warm space, where there's free hot drinks, cakes and refreshments.

10

Keshi Anderson scores the winner in the 78th minute as Blues move into the last 16 of the Vertu EFL Trophy, leaving Exeter City 2-1 to the good.

14

Chris Davies and Craig Gardner are among Club personnel who join the Foundation's Sleep Out at St. Andrew's @ Knighthead Park as part of the Blue Nose fundraising weekend.

15

After a string of fine performances, Lucy Quinn is named Women's Championship Player of the Month for September.

26

Blues are top of the league at Christmas. A 2-0 win against Burton Albion makes it eight successive wins in League and Cup competitions.

10

Dion Sanderson is loaned out to Blackburn Rovers for the remainder of the season.

16

Garry Cook steps down as CEO and board member for personal reasons. Jeremy Dale is appointed Interim CEO.

17

Grant Hanley joins Blues from Norwich City on a free transfer.

18

Blues Women confirm that reigning Supporters Player of the Season Lily Agg requires surgery on an ACL knee injury.

JAN

19

Blues Women begin 2025 in style with a 3-1 away win at Portsmouth. Ellie Mason's looping strike is judged Goal of the Month. And it's a double success for the defender who is named the Championship's Player of the Month for January.

20

Blues and the University of Birmingham join forces to create a strategic alliance to create opportunities in research, education and health, raise aspirations across Birmingham, and enhance the city's reputation on the global stage.







# THE BLUE THREAD

**21** Blues latest partnership is with MiXR and Stonegate Group, the UK's largest pub company. The collaboration connects supporters with matchday and non-matchday benefits through the bar app. The Fan Zone becomes the MiXR Fan Zone.



**24** Simone Magill is revealed as Northern Ireland's Senior Women's Player of the Year for 2024.

JAN

**25** Captain Christie Harrison-Murray signs a contract extension which will keep the midfielder at Blues Women until June 2026 and defender Neve Herron extends her deal by another year, to June 2027.

**27** Blues sign Kieran Dowell on loan from Rangers until the end of the season to boost their options.

**30** Blues Women strengthen their squad with two transfer window signings: Australian international midfielder Emily van Egmond; and Shannon Cooke comes on loan from West Ham United for the remainder of the campaign.

**03** South Korean international Lee Myung-jae signs on a free until the end of the season.

**07** Blues join forces with the Greater Birmingham Convention & Visitors Bureau (GBCVB), the official tourism and marketing organisation for Birmingham, Alabama, USA.

**08** It's a rip-roaring FA Cup Fourth Round tie against Newcastle United in front of the live BBC television cameras. Tomoki Iwata cracks a thunderous goal of the season but Blues lose out in a thriller, 3-2.

FEB

**13** Craig Gardner is appointed Director of Football, stepping up after three-and-a-half years as Technical Director to an expanded role. He will be responsible for all Men's football activities and the Academy set-up.

**16** Shannon Cooke unleashes a rocket into the top corner from 40 yards out against Sheffield United in a 1-0 win for Blues Women at St. Andrew's @ Knighthead Park. It wins the Goal of the Month for February.

**18** Blues reach Wembley for the first time since 2011! A dramatic Vertu EFL Trophy semi-final against Bradford City is settled by Lyndon Dykes' header with just two minutes left on the clock.

**28** Coral are announced as the Club's official UK betting partner, through to 2027/28. They will collaborate on Fan Park activities and provide engaging fan content under the terms of the link-up.

**04** A lacklustre Blues suffer a surprise 3-1 loss at Bolton Wanderers, ending a remarkable run of 18 League One games without defeat, plus four Vertu EFL Trophy wins.

**05** Amy Merricks is awarded the Championship Manager of the Month trophy for February.



MAR

**14** Up to 250 members of the local community are welcomed to the first ever Iftar event at St. Andrew's @ Knighthead Park.

**16** Southampton are beaten at home as Adrianna Franch makes her Blues Women debut. The USA World Cup winning goalkeeper is an eye-catching signing having departed Kansas City.

**30** There's silverware in the Professional Game Academy Cup. Blues Under-21s lift the trophy after a dramatic 4-3 victory against Leicester City at Loughborough.

Georgia Clarke's side prevail and stave off a late Leicester rally, with goals coming from Millie Pullen (two), Lucy Powis and Emily Fitzpatrick.

**01** Jay Stansfield's 85th minute penalty secures a 2-1 victory for Blues at Bristol Rovers – a Club record 37th win of the campaign.

**08** It's a special night at London Road as Blues are promoted back to the Championship after a 2-1 win over Peterborough United.

**10** Blues are going worldwide – on Amazon Prime Video. It is announced a behind-the-scenes documentary following the fortunes of the team and Club this season is to be aired in more than 200 countries.

Steven Knight and Matt Alvarez serve as executive producers on the series.

APR

**11** It's the launch of Blues+ a new digital destination for all things about the Club, including a new matchday show. This coincides with the opening of the Club's first TV and content creation studio, located at the Elite Performance Innovation Centre.

**12** Blues are confirmed as League One Champions following Wrexham's 0-0 draw at Wigan Athletic means they cannot be caught.

**13** Blues fall to defeat in the Vertu EFL Trophy at Wembley, 2-0 to Peterborough United. It is estimated more than 50,000 Blues fans make the trip.

**26** After more than 350 appearances and nine years for Blues, at the age of 36, Lukas Jutkiewicz is to retire from football at the season's end.





# THE BLUE THREAD

27

It's party time as Blues are presented with the League One trophy at St. Andrew's @ Knighthead Park on a memorable afternoon. A 4-0 defeat of Mansfield Town sees them break the League One points record for good measure.

Chris Davies then heads down to London to receive the Sky Bet League One Manager of the Season honour at the EFL awards. Simone Magill's header puts Blues Women 1-0 up at Newcastle United in a crunch fixture. But the hosts equalise so the Championship title and promotion is up for grabs on the final day of the season.

28

Amy Merricks is named the Midlands Football Writers' Women's Coach of the Year.

29

Louise Quinn announces that she is retiring from football at the end of the season. The captain and Republic of Ireland stalwart, who joined Blues Women four years previously, brings down the curtain at the age of 34.

## APR

30

Blues break the EFL points record after a 2-0 win at Blackpool to eclipse Reading's best of 106 set in 2005/06.

Ryan Allsop racks up a 21st clean sheet, meaning he wins the division's Golden Glove.



02

The Foundation receives a six-figure boost as players from the Men's and Women's squads donate a percentage of their win bonuses directly to the charity. The funds are to be used to widen the Foundation's 'Football for All' strategy.

03

Blues round off the campaign with a 2-1 victory at Cambridge United to total an incredible 111 points atop the League One table.

04

Blues Women stage a dramatic fightback against London City Lionesses in the Championship decider at St. Andrew's @ Knighthead Park but can't find the goal they need to win and take the title and promotion. It ends 2-2 in front of nearly 9,000 fans.

It's awards night at the ICC in Birmingham. Christoph Klarer is named Supporters' and Players' Player of the Season for the Men and Jay Stansfield the Young Player of the Season.

Neve Herron wins the Women's Supporters' Player of the Season and Young Player of the season, whilst Simone Magill is crowned Players' Player of the Season.

06

Blues Academy is awarded Category One status by the Professional Game Academy Audit Company.



07

Following a vote of all its members, Sukh Singh is re-elected as Chairman of the independent Official Supporters Club.

11

The first ever Vertu Primary Schools Cup champions, St. John's and Our Lady of Wayside, are crowned at St. Andrew's @ Knighthead Park. It comes after months of qualifiers between 1,000 pupils and 100 primary schools.

## MAY

15

Siobhan Wilson, who spent a year out of the game due to an ACL injury, announces her retirement from football.

16

Zaid Bettoka signs a professional contract having made his First Team debut in an FA Cup tie against Lincoln City at St Andrew's @ Knighthead Park.

19

The inaugural region-wide Trevor Francis Schools Cup culminates in two closely fought finals, with Arden Academy crowned champions of the Mixed tournament, and Bishop Challoner Catholic College picking up the Girls' title, on the hallowed St. Andrew's @ Knighthead Park turf.

20

It is confirmed that Phil Neumann will officially join Blues on July 1 after penning a pre-contract agreement in January and the Club completes the permanent signing of Alfons Sampsted following his season-long loan from FC Twente.

22

Steve Spooner, Blues Lead Professional Development Coach, departs the Cub after 19 years service.

28

Chris Davies is named LMA Manager of the Year for League One.



03

Romelle Donovan joins Brentford for an undisclosed fee.

04

Martha Harris signs a year's extension to her Blues Women contract.

05

Huge news as the Government confirm £2.4 billion funding to boost the West Midlands transport network. It means a new tram line extending the route from the city centre into East Birmingham and beyond will serve the Sports Quarter regeneration project in Bordesley Green.

Chairman Tom Wagner reveals there are plans for a 'purpose-built, on site' railway station at Adderley Park, serving the Sports Quarter.

## JUN

07

Menzi Mazwi makes his international debut for Zimbabwe in their COSAFA Cup game against South Africa.

10

Mark Kennedy returns to Blues as Under-21 Professional Phase Coach having previously been part of Lee Bowyer's backroom staff.

20

Lukas Jutkiewicz takes up the role of First Team Positional Lead Scout, extending his stay at Blues and demonstrating his commitment to the Club.

24

Former Microsoft Corporate Vice-President, Jeremy Dale is appointed as CEO to lead his boyhood team following a successful interim period.

Brandon Khela joins Peterborough United for an undisclosed fee having been developed by the Club's academy since the age of eight.





# A MESSAGE FROM JEREMY DALE

BIRMINGHAM CITY CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER





**A year ago we were all distraught after being relegated so it seems strange now to think this, but I honestly believe relegation was the best thing that could have happened to us.**

**Why? Because this past season has enabled us to rediscover and instil a winning mentality.**

During 2023/24 there were highs and lows. It felt it was very much like three steps forward, two back. But this 2024/25 season was very different. We went into every game expecting to win and we did win the vast majority. That winning mentality was infectious and carried through off the pitch too. We went into every new partner presentation expecting to win the business. We believed we could transform all the lounges in weeks and open new fan parks and fill them out. We believed we could win at everything we set our minds to.

So, relegation enabled us to re-establish this winning mentality for everyone at the Club.

This was all possible because our owners brought stability and built momentum. I've said it many times, that we have got the best owners in football and they demonstrated that because when we got relegated they didn't change their plan. They didn't cut costs or scale back the work on St. Andrew's @ Knighthead Park just because we had dropped into League One. The resolve, fortitude and support from the Board was just extraordinary. Everything starts from the top. So, for me, their commitment spoke volumes.

That commitment together with the appointment of Chris Davies in the summer of 2024 were critical decisions that set the path for the season. Pre-season was vital as it addressed the issues of mentality and culture. Then, of course, it was all about getting off to a fast start on the pitch.

What the Men's team achieved under Chris was remarkable. This was a world record-breaking season, one which so many fans have told me has been their most enjoyable ever.

I wasn't in this position when Chris was hired. I wasn't part of that process. But I know how excited Tom Wagner was with the appointment. From the very first interview he loved Chris' ambition, drive and commitment.

People questioned 'you are hiring a young coach?'. But what we were doing was hiring an experienced coach, because he has been coaching for so many years. Often you bring a young coach who has been playing into their mid-30s and has done very little coaching. Because of Chris' career being cut short by injury when he was a young

player, it took him into the coaching and management route far, far earlier. It has been evident that Chris is both a young and an experienced coach.

His partnership with Craig Gardner has been a joy to see. They worked together to bring this identity and culture that we saw develop. They brought in a great backroom team and the transformation of the squad was fabulous. Fans forget that 16 senior players left and 17 new ones arrived in the summer of 2024. Craig goes under the radar somewhat, but he is a pivotal figure for us and deserves so much of the credit.

On the Women's side, there has been great progress.

It culminated in that title-decider in the last game of the season. It was gut-wrenching to pull two goals back, to be in the ascendancy for those final ten minutes, but we just couldn't get that crucial third goal. We were so close. That would have been the perfect end to the season, a double promotion.

While everyone was clearly disappointed to miss out we are tremendously pleased with how the Women's team has developed. We are proud of Hope Powell, Amy Merricks, and all the players who gave so much. And we are proud of the growth of the support. It was amazing to have nearly 10,000 people in at St. Andrew's @ Knighthead Park to witness such a dramatic Championship finale.

During that final game I was sitting next to Hope when the "Keep Right On" rendition started around the ground and she leant over to me and said 'that's never happened before.' . . . there was a smile on her face and a sense of pride to feel the change that is happening around our Women's team.

Let's move on to off the pitch matters. Commercially this has been our strongest season since the Premier League. Sold out games, fans arriving hours beforehand to enjoy the build-up, the retail store was always rammed and we have fundamentally transformed our partnerships revenue.

At the Wrexham home game, we secured three commercial partnerships that night. We didn't sign the contracts there and then, but we had three big partners who saw what we were about, what was happening at this Club, and went away and very quickly joined us on the journey.

One of the lines we were using with the partners last year was 'it's not the league you are in, it's the club you are'. They saw it that night. We invite potential commercial partners to come on board now, be part of the journey, and they are responding to that proposition. When we get them here, they see it, they experience it, they feel it. I do want to thank all our partners and sponsors for their tremendous support last year. Going back to that Wrexham home game – it was special. Think about it, it was a League One game, but there's a





sell-out crowd on a Monday in front of the Sky cameras. We have got Tom Brady, David Beckham, Gary Neville and a host of others watching us. The atmosphere in the stadium was insane. After our second goal, you could hear the noise from Moor Street Station - I saw the videos of it!

For me, it was one of the best nights ever at St. Andrew's. That was because I saw the first sign that the magic had returned. What a special night.

Next, let's talk about our Foundation and the wonderful work it does in the community. It has continued to develop and expand.

One of the big themes for us, that Tom Wagner and I talk about often, is that we must always be a caring Club. We must care for our fans, the community and the people in it, our partners.

We have got a tremendous opportunity and responsibility to help those who are less fortunate. We have spoken about the power of the Blues badge to inspire people and to change lives and that is not lost on any of us. Our Foundation work is paramount to defining who we are, what we do and stand for. I am also sure it was very important in getting the Government to unlock the funding for the tram system to the Sports Quarter.

They saw that we were a club who cares about its community and who are active in the community.

The Sports Quarter project has, understandably, captured the imagination. It is so exciting, not just for Blues fans but for the whole city. It's an investment in Birmingham, it's transformational to East Birmingham, it's regenerating a city through a football club. That's the beauty of what's in front of us.

The amount of work the Knighthead team - Tom, Andrew Shanahan, Kyle Kneisly and Matt Alvarez - have all done in terms of progressing the Club, the Sports Quarter, championing Birmingham City at every level of influence in this country, has been astounding.

I don't think the fans realise quite how many days Tom and his team spend here in the UK supporting the Club and pushing forward the Sports Quarter plans.

I'd like to finish this message with a huge thank you to our fans.

It would have been easy for them to have gone 'typical Blues, same old Blues' after our relegation, but they didn't. They stepped forward and we sold 50 per cent more season tickets. They got fully behind Chris Davies and the players. They got behind the Club in every way, packing out the stadium, filling the fan parks, supporting our

Foundation initiatives, turning up in more numbers than ever before for our Women's games.

Our catering provider told me that we drank more beer than any other football club in the Midlands – so our fans are world class when it comes to a lot of aspects, and drinking beer is apparently one of those!

They are 'true heroes'; I applaud them for what they did over the season, but they are also our motivation because the joy that we see on their faces is what keeps us coming to work every day.

Next season will be more challenging, but we have got our winning mentality back, we are all working every minute of every day to make sure we are in the best position as a Club.

If we all get behind the team, focus on our love for Blues that binds us all together, I am sure 2025/26 will be another successful season.

**Keep right on!**







BIRMINGHAM CITY FOOTBALL CLUB

# RECORD BREAKERS

KEY RECORDS SET AND STATS FROM A REMARKABLE  
2024/25 SEASON FOR THE MEN'S TEAM

CHAMPIONS 2025





IT WAS A  
NEVER-TO-BE-FORGOTTEN  
SEASON FOR BLUES MEN.  
RECORDS GALORE WERE  
BROKEN AND NEW  
ACHIEVEMENTS  
UNLOCKED.  
HERE'S THE STAGGERING  
STATS BEHIND THE  
SUCCESS.

**MOST POINTS EVER**  
ACCUMULATED IN A  
PROFESSIONAL LEAGUE,  
WORLDWIDE, OF 111.<sup>1</sup>

**RECORD NUMBER OF  
POINTS IN THE EFL,**  
BEATING READING'S  
CHAMPIONSHIP TALLY OF  
106 IN 2005/06.

EQUALLED THE BIGGEST  
**TITLE-WINNING MARGIN**  
IN ENGLISH FOOTBALL OF  
19 POINTS  
(MANCHESTER CITY,  
2017/18).

RECORD NUMBER OF  
WINS IN A SEASON IN  
THE TOP FOUR TIERS —  
34 — BEATING  
DONCASTER'S TALLY OF  
33 IN 1946/47.

**HIGHEST AVERAGE  
POSSESSION** — 66.7% —  
ACROSS ALL ENGLAND'S  
TOP FOUR DIVISIONS.<sup>2</sup>

A CLUB RECORD **44 WINS**  
IN A SEASON.<sup>3</sup>

A NEW CLUB RECORD OF  
**15 AWAY WINS** IN A  
SEASON AND MOST  
AWAY POINTS ACCRUED.

**UNBEATEN AT HOME IN  
THE LEAGUE** FOR THE  
FIRST TIME SINCE  
1971/72 AND ONLY THE  
FOURTH TIME IN CLUB  
HISTORY.

EQUAL CLUB RECORD OF  
MOST HOME WINS — 22 -  
IN ALL COMPETITIONS.

<sup>1</sup>Verdy Kawasaki 108 points in 1994/95, Red Star Belgrade 108 points in 2020/21

<sup>2</sup>Only Barcelona (68.7%), Bayern Munich (68%) and Champions League winners Paris Saint-Germain (68.3%) averaged higher

<sup>3</sup>All competitions





TOTAL OF **61 POINTS** EQUALLED THE BEST COMPILED AT HOME IN THE THIRD TIER<sup>4</sup> AND THE MOST OF ANY CLUB IN THE TOP FOUR ENGLISH DIVISIONS IN 2024/25.

**TEN HOME WINS IN A ROW**, FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE 1920/21.

JOINT CLUB RECORD FOR THE **LOWEST AMOUNT OF LEAGUE DEFEATS** — THREE - IN A CAMPAIGN.<sup>5</sup>

**CONCEDED JUST 11 GOALS AT HOME** IN THE LEAGUE, THE LOWEST TOTAL SINCE 1948/49.

A ST. ANDREW'S GOAL DIFFERENCE OF +36, THE BEST SINCE 1946/47.<sup>6</sup>

SCORED A LEAGUE-HIGH **84 GOALS** IN TOTAL, WHICH WAS SECOND ONLY TO LEEDS UNITED'S 95 IN THE EFL.

REACHED 100 GOALS IN A SEASON IN THE FIFTH FASTEST TIME.

**SCORED 111 GOALS IN ALL COMPETITIONS**, OVERTAKING THEIR 109 FROM THE 1893/94 SEASON.<sup>7</sup>

**CONCEDED JUST 31 LEAGUE GOALS**, BETTERED BY ONLY TWO TEAMS ACROSS THE TOP FOUR DIVISIONS IN ENGLAND.

THE FIRST EFL TEAM SINCE NOTTS COUNTY IN 1997/98 TO WIN THE DIVISION WITH AS MANY AS SIX GAMES STILL TO PLAY.

BECAME THE FASTEST SIDE IN EFL HISTORY TO **REACH 100 POINTS**, BEATING READING'S PREVIOUS RECORD OF 44 GAMES.

CHRIS DAVIES NAMED **LEAGUE ONE MANAGER OF THE YEAR** AND LMA LEAGUE ONE MANAGER OF THE YEAR.

CHRIS DAVIES WITH 34 WINS RECORDED THE MOST IN A MANAGER'S FIRST SEASON IN THE EFL.

CHRISTOPH KLARER, TOMOKI IWATA, ALEX COCHRANE NAMED IN THE LEAGUE ONE TEAM OF THE YEAR.

RYAN ALLSOP **GOLDEN GLOVE WINNER**.<sup>8</sup>

**HIGHEST AVERAGE HOME ATTENDANCE** SINCE 2005/06 OF 26,326.

**SECOND HIGHEST ATTENDANCE GROWTH** FROM 23/24 — 24/25 ACROSS ENGLAND'S TOP FOUR TIERS.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Plymouth Argyle, 2022/23

<sup>5</sup>Equalling 1892/93

<sup>6</sup>+40

<sup>7</sup>6 goals shy of the Club's record of 117, set in 1994/95

<sup>8</sup>21 league clean sheets

<sup>9</sup>+24.3 per cent (behind Oxford United)





# MAKING HISTORY

A CONVERSATION WITH CHRIS DAVIES







## MEN'S FIRST TEAM MANAGER CHRIS DAVIES PROVIDES US WITH A SPECIAL GLIMPSE OF A REMARKABLE 2024/25 AND HOW BLUES WON LEAGUE ONE AND BECAME RECORD-BREAKERS.

**What were your key priorities in pre-season? There was a large turnover of players, 17 in and almost as many out before the end of the summer window alone.**

First was the playing squad. Some players wanted to leave, some wanted to stay; there was a huge turnover. The recruitment was a massive job in that window, along with Craig Gardner and the recruitment department, looking at players constantly. That summer, it was genuinely close to 100 players we spoke to. It was incredible.

It was the playing style, too. I knew I was going to have to transform it from the previous season. I wanted to play a particular style that maybe wasn't synonymous with Birmingham City. I needed to convince everybody of that style of play because it could have been seen as something that hasn't worked before.

Then the other point was culture. I am conscious it is a bit of a buzzword, so I am cautious of using it. But it was standards, discipline, organisation, all those things that form a good, solid culture. Those were my three headlines.

**How did you manage to instil a new identity, a fresh playing style in such a short space of time? The team had been a low block, defensively-minded, the plucky underdog, for a decade plus.**

I think I was a good fit for that. I convinced everyone through training and analysis. I am a guy who does the coaching. I'm not someone who just stands back and observes. I knew my strengths were on the grass coaching. I put sessions on to try and impose our style. And there were a lot of long analysis meetings that the players probably weren't used to, but it was trying to make it clear how we needed to play.

I think we had a great opportunity, hence why I came. I could have gone to the Championship instead of Birmingham. But I knew, whether we liked it or not, that we would have more of the ball than the opposition. Just by the stature of the Club. So even if a coach came to Birmingham and was used to playing a low block, defensive style, they would still have 60 per cent possession in League One because just the presence of the badge, the Club, would have intimidated the opposition to the extent where they would drop off.

It was suitable to me. I had been at Celtic, where they had 70 per cent possession every single game. I had been at

Liverpool for three or four years. I had been at Spurs. Clubs that are used to being the protagonist, the dominant force in a game. I even worked at a club like Swansea where it was about dominating the ball.

I was sure I had the expertise to deliver that playing style and then it was about using the skills to convince people.

**The Wrexham game seemed pivotal in so many ways: the Hollywood razzmatazz surrounding it, Tom Brady and David Beckham, live on Sky Sports, the manner of the victory . . . did you get that sense, as everyone there did, that something special was brewing, on and off the field, after what transpired?**

I sensed it in late pre-season, to be honest. But the Wrexham game was the showcase to the world really. Everybody was watching it. When we went a goal down, I knew we would win because I was sure where we were at and I just had a really good feeling going into the game. There was a lot of noise around it, but I just detached myself from that. I'm not the sort who'd be hanging out with David Beckham and talking to celebrities. I just took myself right away from it. What was helpful for me was that it felt like the type of games I was used to, because I had been in the Premier League for so long. A lot of the hype I was used to, high profile occasions, and I tried to relay that to the players in that if you are clever, you ignore it. And you just play football.

**What did you tweak after the loss at Shrewsbury Town in November? To go on that run thereafter was astonishing - top at Christmas, 18 unbeaten in the league, four wins in the Vertu Trophy to progress to the Final?**

Tactically we had been lopsided: very attacking with our right full-back and our left full-back staying back. Between Shrewsbury, the Exeter game after that and probably all the way through to the Wigan game on New Year's Day, I swung it the other way. Bielik had a little period of playing on the right of that back four. That gave us, during those winter months when it was a bit scrappier, a bit more height in the backline, a bit more strength on set-pieces and stuff. It gave us a different feel. Jay Stansfield then played off the left a little bit more, Alfie May got more game time and Lyndon Dykes got more game time as a nine. And then from New Year's onwards, I went back to what we started with.

The Shrewsbury game for me was an important one because it was a real setback and you could see the pressures the players were under. Everybody was under, in fact; all the scrutiny. It was a bit of a light bulb moment for me as a coach and manager because I realised that as much as you want it and try to make it happen, the reason I was given this job was for all the skills I had developed over the years and it's sometimes hard to see that when you are in this kind of duress.





What I understood was that I had to use all the skills, potentially different skills, to when I first came in. Back then, it was basically a case of this is a sinking ship and you need to get this thing up, get it back afloat and start moving. And I was relentless in how I was going at it. Then get into a sticky patch, you realise it's about leadership and that people really need support. They need helping, managing and guiding. I just tried to make sure I inspired the players and kept pushing them forward but brought everyone together. That was a critical moment for me as a manager to see that and from then on, we didn't look back.

**It seemed the team always found a way to win and showed they could also mix it whatever the circumstance – the horrific conditions at Barnsley, the aerial assault at Stockport in the second-half. Maybe that was overlooked, the defensive strength, the way you had leaders and players who could dig in and do the other side of the game?**

We were the best defence by far. Our back four was recognised in various teams of the year. We were solid, a very solid defensive side. We won a lot of games by just one goal. That wasn't always pleasant as I wasn't enjoying it when there was 10 minutes to go! Other coaches commented to me towards the end of the season about how many games we won 1-0 or 2-1 and that shows a sort of strength you've got, of a backbone to the team. Klarer was a great leader for us in that backline. Ever present. Strong on set-pieces. Could claim the ball.

What we did well in those winter months, when pitches weren't great, the weather was poor - Barnsley was like a hurricane - we played good football, but we also played the conditions well. We learned very quickly that if a team was almost gung-ho in how they pressed us, we basically attacked the space behind with the pace we had. We didn't invite pressure unnecessarily, we almost played a strategic game whereas if a team gave us time, we utilised it and got into a rhythm; but if they didn't, we tried to punish them in the space. And we had Ryan Allsop's quality on the ball, which meant we could go directly in behind. We got to grips with all that and we found a good method, which the players believed in. Whatever the opposition were going to throw at us, we had a solution for it - and that made us a bit of a machine.

We did a lot of analysis on this stuff and learning how we could improve, and we were pretty relentless. People also say that the morale was good. I always caveat that with winning builds morale as well. Sometimes it is hard to have it when you are losing, almost impossible at times. But hopefully, if tough times come, then you have got enough in the bank to get you through.

**You've said previously that football is about making memories; so what was it like, those scenes at Peterborough United, when promotion was clinched?**

That was the best game of my football life. I think back with such fondness. Everything was beautiful about it. People







on the outside would say 'well, you're going to get promoted anyway'. But you had to be in that stadium with 4,000 of our fans who, to a man, didn't leave, and all the players and staff celebrating with them on the pitch. Relief, the joy, everyone together . . . it was proof that no one actually believed it until we had it in our hands. And it was the best 25 minutes of our season, you know. You can go 20 seasons in football and finish 8th, 9th, 10th whatever every single season, but that kind of memory is something that will last a lifetime.

**Did the emotion of that night, plus then knowing you had won the league due to other results on the way down to the Vertu EFL Trophy Final, adversely affect what happened at Wembley? A huge release off the shoulders, almost?**

I think it did. We got promoted on the Tuesday, won the league at 2.30pm on the Saturday and we left 3pm the same day on the bus for Wembley. Everybody was naturally sort of high fiving on the bus down and I had a very short window to personally process that and also get them up for a cup final. If we go back in time the players will say they were ready for it, we all will say we were ready for it. But what we missed that day was an edge.

An edge for us that, in a 60-game season, was missing only for, what, three games? Not many. That's an unbelievable return. But unfortunately for us one of those games was a Wembley final. I am pretty confident had we not won the league that day, we would have won at Wembley. It's a very vague comment because it's hard to put your finger on it but it's to do with probably a release, a sense of satisfaction and losing a little bit of a cause and an edge that we had previously.

**From then on, how pleased were you with the way the side finished the season with such aplomb, drawing one game then five straight victories, setting an unprecedented points total, amongst other records?**

That's the next point: we would probably never have got the record 111, the wins record, without losing at Wembley. But what Wembley did was made me realise that I needed to give and identify a new cause that we were fighting for. And as I explained to the players, it was a legacy of what we wanted to be and remembered for: a League One record or potentially an English record, which eventually transpired to be a world record, and also the most wins in a season ever, which we got to with 34. That was a real driving force in the last six games. If we had won the final, I think it would have been very hard to do all that.

**The pressure everyone was under from day one, the expectation, Jay Stansfield's record signing, getting every opponents' best effort and seeing them hunker down around their own area most games . . . do you think what you achieved in the season got the credit it truly deserved?**

To be honest, I actually don't know the answer to that question because I've made a conscious effort since I've been a manager to not follow any media or stuff like that. I got the sense at the time that maybe it was a little bit dismissed as in 'well, they should have got promoted'. But when we got the points record, I think that was almost a validation that could it really be argued with? People could say you've got the money; you've got the squad. But you must go and do it, go and achieve. Many a club and player could have cocked up, messed it right up. So, it was an achievement that I have said to the players that I don't believe in my lifetime any English football team will better and get 112 points. And when you achieve something in a 150-year history of English football then you know it's pretty special.

What was also telling for me was that I was named EFL Manager of the Year for League One but also the LMA Manager of the Year. I never see these awards as self-gratification; it's more a case of a combined effort from everyone. But the LMA one is voted for by other managers. If there was a dismissive side to what we did, I wouldn't have got the votes. But obviously enough of them would have seen the challenges of what we had to face and that, for me, was a big symbol of how highly people in the game at least viewed our achievement.

**What was your biggest takeaway from 2024/25?**

My main takeaway is that we achieved a world record. In any sport, in any contest, that in anyone's eyes is an incredible feat. I am letting the sun set on that this summer and the new page has turned as we look forward to next season. But processing and understanding it . . . I have been in football a long time, I know how hard it is to win a game of football. And it doesn't matter what team you have got - we see it in the FA Cup, the big dogs going down to League One and Two and struggling - to achieve a world record, the efforts of everyone and what we did, was the big thing.

A season that the Club and the fans deserved and was almost written in the stars a little bit because there's been bad leadership, bad ownership and terrible seasons for a long time. Everyone just needed to get their faith rejuvenated in the Club and the football again. Every fan I have spoken to was so happy about the season. It was a bit of a rebirth of hopefully a new era.





# POSITIVE STRIDES FORWARD

A CONVERSATION WITH AMY MERRICKS







## WE TALK TO HEAD COACH AMY MERRICKS ABOUT A DRAMATIC 2024/25 AND WHY BLUES WOMEN ARE MAKING GREAT STRIDES.

The desire to go one better is burning bright at Blues Women.

For so long they were the leading lights in a tremendous tussle at the top of the Barclays Women's Championship in 2024/25.

In the end, it came down to the final afternoon of the campaign when the title and the solitary promotion spot were on the line.

A Blues victory would have given them the glory. Blues rallied from 2-0 down against London City Lionesses in front of close to 9,000 fans at St. Andrew's @ Knighthead Park.

But amid frantic scenes after Cho So-hyun made it 2-2 with just four minutes to go, they couldn't force a winner, and the subsequent draw meant that London took the silverware and the place in the WSL.

Head Coach Amy Merricks, looking back on that dramatic finale to the season, is naturally disappointed. But she is not disheartened - far from it.

"We have to be absolutely ruthless next season and



ensure we can take matters into our own hands before getting to that kind of situation again," she reflects.

"Ultimately the first-half was very cagey. I didn't think we performed to the standards we pride ourselves on in that first-half.

"However, to come back from 2-0 down was outstanding and showed the character of the group. "We worked really hard in the week preparing for the game. But ultimately, your fortunes are based on results across the 10 months before, not just one fixture.

"So, we are clear on what we need to do. "Sometimes the harshest lessons you learn the most from."

Blues had the best defence in the league and the best away record. But they couldn't quite get enough daylight between themselves and London, as well as

Charlton Athletic and Durham, to ever relax.

They had to readjust to opposition changing their tactics because they were viewed so credibly. Losing key forward Lily Agg to an ACL injury in January as well as goalkeeper Lucy Thomas had to be absorbed, too.

Merricks says: "We had some real markers in there that showed an upward curve in our progression. "The defensive side of our display across the whole season was fantastic. We had the best defensive record, we were hard to break down and I think to be a champion side, that's part and parcel of it. That wins you championships.

"Aside from the defence, we had the greatest number of chances created which, again, shows to me that we are moving in the right direction."

Blues were always in the mix, an improvement after finishing fifth in 2023/24. Summer recruitment

revolved around adding to a core base with a mix of exciting youth and experienced talent.

Northern Ireland duo Simone Magill and Rebecca McKenna came in, Ava Baker, one of the country's top prospects, was signed from Leicester City and South Korea international Lee Geum-min was a major addition.

"Having the likes of Lee in the group, who has performed in WSL for a number of years and on the international stage, helped develop the players we already had. It lifted the intensity and standards we had in training and in the environment, to a WSL-ready level. That's what we were seeking. "We knew that it was going to be competitive, the league. We knew the intentions of London City early on. So, we really had to be fierce with what we were doing in our recruitment."

Before the season got underway, Blues hosted their first ever Women's open training session at St. Andrew's @ Knighthead Park. A thousand fans watched Merricks and her staff put the team through their paces before mingling with the players and getting souvenir selfies.

With plenty of fun activities also on offer for the whole family, it proved to a popular afternoon and ideal curtain-raiser to 2024/25.

Throughout the season, in fact, the way the team connected with fans in this way was a theme. The players also supported the work of the Birmingham City Foundation, lending their time and assistance to numerous initiatives and events. When the action got underway in September, Blues





made the rest of the country sit up and take notice. Sunderland were hammered in the opening match, 5-0.

“We had a fast start, a real statement of intent and displayed some excellent qualities in that game.

“As a result, some of the teams we then played set up slightly differently, so we had to start adapting. That’s what you face, don’t you, when you become a respected side.

“Although we came out of October top of the league, we stalled a couple of times with challenges against Durham and Bristol City in those first few games.” Blues were top at Christmas, too. Heading towards the run-in, the Club’s ambition was clear once more when on deadline day Australian international Emily van Egmond was snared and Shannon Cooke, on loan from West Ham United. Former World Cup winner with America, Adrianna Franch, was also added.

Whilst Blues had exited both cup competitions, the Championship title was still very much there for the taking at this stage.

The pressure was naturally ratcheted up, but it was not something that bothered Merricks unduly.

“Pressure is a privilege. To be at a club like Birmingham you have got to get used to pressure because we want to be fighting at the top and taking us to back to where we need to be.

“We wanted to embrace the opportunity and enjoy the ride, which we certainly did.”

When Blues beat Durham in their third but last match to reignite the title hopes after a draw at Charlton Athletic, it signposted much of the work that had been happening on the Knighthead Performance Centre grass and in mentality change.

“It was massive,” notes Merricks. “It was the first time in two years we’d come from behind to win a game. And especially by a two-goal cushion. That showed a turning point not just in our performance on the pitch but in our culture, the mindset and winning mentality of the team. “We wanted to shift a lot of the mindset and culture this season, the environment and processes, which I felt we did.”

Through the commitment of Knighthead’s ownership, the work Technical Director Hope Powell has been doing since joining Blues and Merrick’s technical and coaching acumen, there is a springboard to go again – and go further.

The upgrade in the training ground has been well documented; support staffing levels have been boosted and Blues are a desired transfer market destination.

A Head of Performance will be in place very soon. Merricks says: “It has also been a bit of transitional season if you think about it.

“We have recruited a number of new members of staff in the backroom team. A lot of knowledge and experience has been added, which enhances us as a group and makes us better, on and off the pitch. “We have a fantastic foundation of being WSL-ready

before we get there.

“Yes, of course we are all disappointed we couldn’t get over the line this season. But I am positive about the future, and we know exactly what we have to do to take that final step.”

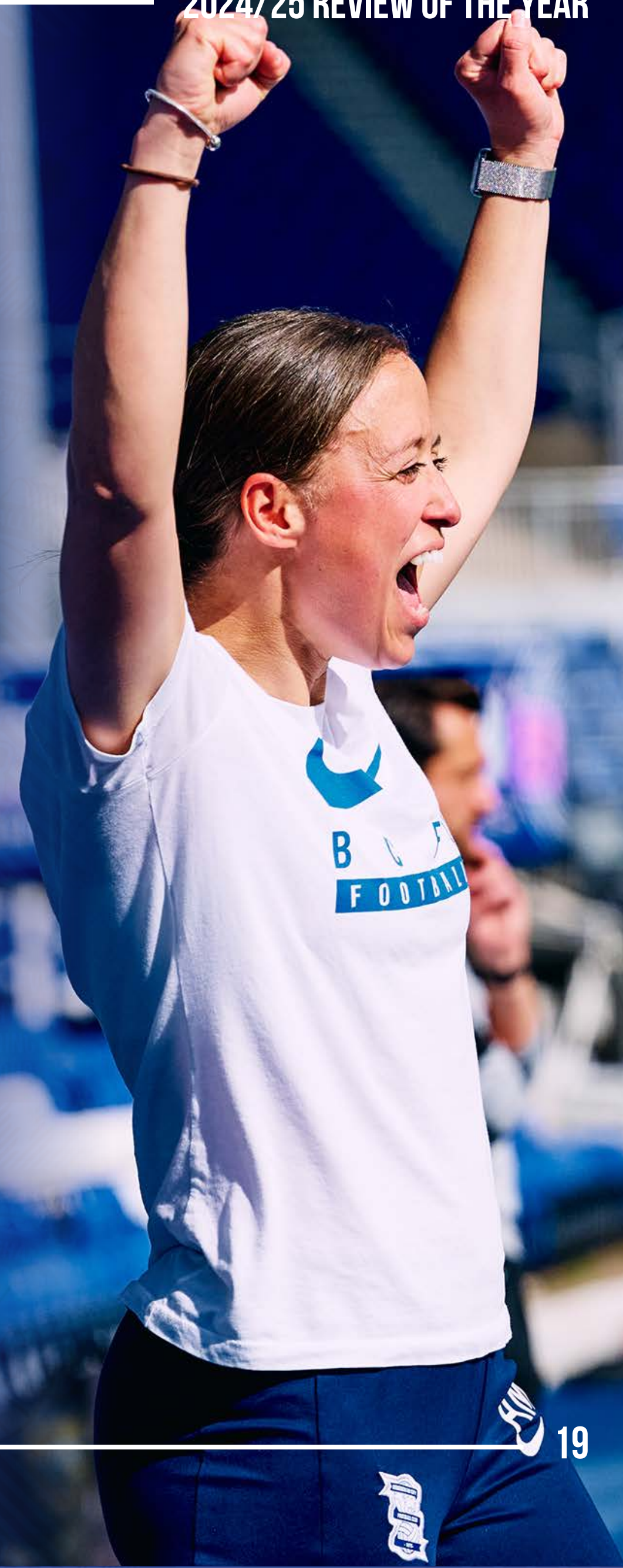
The Blues squad is now peppered with more internationals than ever before. And there were breakthroughs for players in the younger age groups.

Neve Herron, the Young and Supporters’ Player of the Season, made her England Under-23 debut. Ashanti Akpan broke into the same squad. Baker captained England Under-19s and was on European Championship duty this month.

Team Captain Christie Harrison-Murray reached the milestone of 100 appearances for Blues in September. And there was also a tinge of sadness surrounding another stalwart, Louise Quinn, the 122 times capped Ireland international, who announced her retirement. The Club Captain spent the last four years at Blues and was a key performer and popular figure.

“One of the words I’d use to describe Lou is selfless,” says Merricks. “She really puts others before herself. She is always very considerate in terms of what other people need and how they are feeling.

“She is incredibly driven as well. When she got injured in the middle of the season it hit us hard. We are going to miss her, her ability on the pitch and her leadership qualities.”







# THE SPORTS QUARTER

A DEFINING MOMENT

 **Sports Quarter**

Platform 1 towards East Birmingham and Solihull





## THE SPORTS QUARTER HAS CAPTURED THE IMAGINATION OF THE WIDER PUBLIC AND SPORTING WORLD.

The centrepiece of this £3 billion project is a 60,000-seat multi-purpose stadium, the like of which will not have been seen before.

The world's leading architects are competing for the contract to design the stadium, which will include a retractable pitch, to allow for non-sporting events like concerts to take place.

Another aim is to maximise the elevated view of the city skyline and to provide a visual effect that carries a 'wow' factor.

### The Sports Quarter will be the engine that powers Blues into a bold, exciting future.

And it will be a regenerative boom for the city and communities in East Birmingham, as well as providing a fillip for the region and country in general from an economic standpoint.

On June 5, the announcement ahead of the Government Spending Review that £2.4 billion would be given to the West Midlands Combined Authority to improve transport infrastructure was critical.

Around £400 million was pledged to extend the Metro tramline from the city centre, through Digbeth to the Sports Quarter, at the old Birmingham Wheels site, and into East Birmingham.

Chairman Tom Wagner summed the seismic news up thus: "This is such a big moment for Blues.

"We received the Government support we needed to ensure that the Sports Quarter becomes a reality, allowing us to build our new home just a stone's throw from St. Andrew's.

"The only real obstacle we faced was a viable transport solution to ensure that we could move all of our supporters, fans, workers and other community members in and out of the Sports Quarter on a daily basis.

"That is no longer uncertain."

In addition, there are plans for a purpose-built railway station on site at Adderley Park to serve the Sports Quarter.

The vision is that it will become an iconic 'sporting coliseum', respectful of local heritage, and provide an all-year location for sport, culture, leisure, entertainment, retail and education. Blues will build a training complex for their Professional senior teams and Academies.

There will be on-site accommodation that can be used by players, scholars, trialists and staff.

A proposed indoor arena for concerts and events

promises to be another striking aspect of the Sports Quarter.

The Sports Quarter will enhance the Club, the city and connect with the local community, acting like a campus for those who live and work there. There will be provision for housing and hotels, recreational facilities and plenty of green space.

For several months Tom Wagner has engaged with the Government, assisted by the West Midlands Mayor Richard Parker and local MP for Birmingham Ladywood, Shabana Mahmood.

The upshot was the big reveal, at St. Andrew's @ Knighthead Park, by the Chancellor Rachel Reeves, earlier this month.

Like many, Nick Smith, Blues Head of Infrastructure, has been unable to hide his enthusiasm. "Honestly, apart from Knighthead buying the Club, in my time of being at Blues, I don't know if there has ever been a more significant announcement," he says, referring to Reeves' address. "It is that big!"

"People think that you just go and get funding but it just doesn't happen like that.

"The collaboration of many key stakeholders has been significant and positive in order for this to happen. We are very grateful for the role that everyone has played. "It's the first big key to open the first big door to allow the Sports Quarter to now flow at pace.

"We have been on this for a year, with 75 consultants

working on the project already, the master plan and business plan.

"It's not the start, but it feels like a real defining moment - it's that big. It is super exciting." The plan for the Sports Quarter will be submitted in 2026.

If all goes well Blues are hoping to have spades in the ground in 2028.

### The Club intends to move with the utmost speed to deliver a project whose impact will be felt across the city, the region and the UK.







# BLUES ACADEMY





# THE DRIVE TO CATEGORY ONE STATUS

MIKE RIGG, BLUES ACADEMY TECHNICAL DIRECTOR, TALKS US THROUGH A TRANSFORMATIVE SEASON AND HOW THE CLUB WERE AWARDED CATEGORY ONE STATUS

When you have been relegated and tacitly warned about repeating the mistakes of the past, logic tells you not to overreach.

But this is a Birmingham City that sets an ambitious agenda and follows through on it.

When Knighthead came in as owners, Blues Academy was earmarked for a significant overhaul.

The immediate target was to achieve Category One status, the gold standard under the criteria put in place by football's governing bodies.

However, in May last year Blues were relegated from the Championship and often the knock-on effect can be significantly damaging.

And when Blues previously were awarded a provisional Category One licence, it was revoked in 2022 after a solitary season.

So it is understandable there was plenty of trepidation in the corridors and out on the pitches of the Knighthead Performance Centre, West Hills, where the club's Academy is based, 12 months ago.

Would the plug be pulled?

Mike Rigg, the Technical Director of Blues Academy, takes up the story.

"When we got relegated, naturally there was a nervousness around will we still do this. Often there are cutbacks, redundancies, a club might not want to carry on with certain things.

"When we went through that bad period in May, everyone's heart sank. But the narrative from above was remarkable. The leadership and Knighthead went no, stick to the plan – which is pretty much unheard of.

"We had to have a conversation with the EFL from the start telling them what we wanted to do (apply for a licence).

"Our contact there who we liaised with, Dan Harris, was brilliant. He gave us advice which was straight to the point: you have done this before and messed up; do it again and play at it, you won't be taken seriously and probably won't get another opportunity.

"So, we sat down with the leadership, and we realised we needed to go 'Cat One plus' - show that ambition and more."

With the green light to proceed and knowing there could be no margin for error when the Professional Game Academy Audit Company came to audit Blues – a key week-long visit took place in February – there was a remarkable and rapid transformation.

Staffing levels and infrastructure were critical elements to the Category One application.

"We were allowed to advertise jobs and bring people in," Rigg recalls. "And then through Nick Smith, there was the delivery of the infrastructure."

More than £5 million was spent on revamping the Knighthead Performance Centre. A new modular building was interwoven among existing areas to completely reconfigure the site.

From upgrading the pitches, to new gym, recovery areas and analysis suites, dressing rooms and classrooms, a new canteen, and lounges for parents where they and their offspring could also work, the

change was drastic.

"The artificial pitch got replaced, the irrigation sprinkler system and drainage in the middle tier pitches got done, which meant for the first time in over 15 seasons the pitches were playable in both winter and summer. "Up to this point we had people in portacabins. Staff came back in pre-season to find new goals, new balls - not ones three years old, tatty and with patches falling off - new bags, bibs and cones, the lot.

"There was branding around the outside of the building, it looked the part. A new canteen. it made everyone very proud to be part of the Blues.

"When the auditors came to visit us, they realised everything we said we'd do was happening. The people, the infrastructure.

"But we had to do it by going Cat One and above. For example, there are rules and regulations what you need in terms of staff. In regards psychology and player support, instead of one person that is recommended, we have three, which better reflects the needs of the players. So, we have more people working across all the (age group) phases. That's what I mean by going





over and above and ensuring the players get top class support.

“There was unwavering support from everybody in the club. A no excuses culture.

“The challenge with all of this, is that it would normally take three or four, five years to develop. It was accelerated into a 12-month period.”

Blues were awarded a Category One licence in May this year.

**Rigg has a mantra of 'think slowly and act fast', as that is how big projects get done. And, make no mistake, this was a big project.**

“An awful lot of time and detail went into discussing and deciding what we needed, you can’t rush the planning. And within the rules and regulations.

“This is where Louisa Collis, our Academy Manager (pictured, right), was relentless in making sure we reached the standards required and adhered to the criteria, because you can’t fudge it, and she ensured we went above and beyond.

“A real brilliant concoction of everybody coming together, and the ownership and leadership delivering – fast and to their word every time.”



# WHAT IS A CATEGORY ONE ACADEMY?

Clubs must prove to the Professional Game Academy Audit Company (PGAAC) they have what it takes.

The PGAAC was established by the Premier League, EFL, and The FA, under the Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP) in 2012.

It came in the aftermath of England’s failure to qualify for Euro 2008 and a disappointing 2010 World Cup campaign.

The plan had a clear ambition – for the English professional game to produce more and better homegrown players through the development of a world-leading Academy system.

Academies are assessed by PGAAC based on numerous factors related to player development, including

productivity, facilities, coaching, education and welfare. They are rated from Category One – Four, regardless of what division the club’s first team are in.

Apart from one season, Blues have been a Category Two Academy.

Their youth teams have competed in the Professional Development League.

Now, after the award of a Category One licence for 2025/26, the Under-18s and Under-21s join Premier League 2 and the games programme from Under-9s upwards will be against the top teams.

Blues are among 28 Category One academies and the upgrade will also assist the Club in attracting top talent both regionally and across the UK.





# A CONVERSATION WITH ACADEMY TECHNICAL DIRECTOR MIKE RIGG



Becoming a Category One Academy means you are joining the elite.

The best coaching provision, the best facilities, the best support network and, all being well, the wherewithal to recruit and develop the best players.

In May this year, all the determined hard work in the drive towards this goal paid off for Blues – a Category One licence was granted for 2025/26.

Helping to this end, Craig Gardner became Director of Football in February and assumed overall responsibility for the Academy, thus ensuring a clear and strong link between the First Team and Blues youth development.

Mike Rigg, Blues Academy Technical Director, is in no doubt that securing the licence is another positive step forward in the way the Club is evolving.

“The way you quantify Category One is that you are taken seriously by people,” he says.

“What I mean by that is you are taken seriously by players and parents because they are very aware of what elite clubs are providing, they want to be part of the best with best.

“It's a lot different to how it was. Remember the charter for quality under Howard Wilkinson (developed in 1997 to establish academies). Nobody really knew what it was, only the people inside football really.

“Now everybody knows about Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP). Players, parents, agents all know the difference between Category One and Category Two,

the standard of games programme, what's delivered and the support behind it.

“Under the charter for quality there wasn't that much difference between the centres of excellence in the old academies.

**“Now, our credibility to deliver on the highest level is there for all to see.**

“There is nowhere in the world that has got the depth of quality that EPPP has put together the last 14 years. Nowhere. No country in the world has got what we have through EPPP. Investment, the infrastructure, the depth and quality both on and off the pitch.

“So that's why it's important. Post Brexit it is becoming increasingly competitive. Prior to Brexit we could recruit from abroad, around Europe a lot easier. Now, nationally, within the UK, it is extremely competitive. If we are not up there with the best, with the rest of the Cat Ones, it would just make it that much harder for us.”

There have been numerous benefits from all that Blues put in place this season to get Category One status. “I would say we have had a massive uplift across every department in the Academy,” Rigg comments.

**“There's not one department which has suffered or been left behind.**

“We brought Mike Scott in as Head of Coaching. He is one of the most experienced people in this field in the





country. His experience, bringing that in for the coaches, is incredible.

“Matt Cook joined us as Head of Academy Performance Support, with his background being part of the City Football Group and his wealth of international experience. His expertise in performance and support knowledge is another huge plus. The medical, fitness, psychology – he’s raised it onto another level.

“We are very well resourced across all the departments.

“An awful lot of people are now going into Category One football as their first personal experience of it, but we are all relishing that because there's no fear about where we are going, no kind of jaded opinions of what it is. Everyone is going into it kind of wide-eyed and with real excitement.

**“None of us are doubting the size of the task in front of us – it’s not just being part of Category One but producing the highest quality players.”**

And Rigg says that whilst it might be harder for Blues own to gain a breakthrough at first team level due to the way the Club is improving, it’s to be expected. “I talk about this a lot: I refuse to have the words like ‘blocked pathway’ and it being used at the Club. The pathway is not blocked, it’s just now the standards have been raised enormously.

“What's happened is that the bar has been raised. What's happened with the standard of coach and players in the First Team going so big and so quickly, we have now got to match that inside the Academy. “The gap between what we had been previously and what's got to happen is significant.

“But what I will say is that's never going to stop. The rat race never stops. You must go from League One to the Championship. Then the Premier League. Then the real hard work starts, in staying there and progressing.

“The standards being set in the Club are huge. It is our job as an Academy to raise our standards as well and I am really pleased we have got an awful lot of capable people across all areas who have a bright future and are relishing the challenge we have got in front of us.”

Due to the bumper resources assigned to Blues Academy compared to years gone by and across-the-board improvements, there also must be an element of business pragmatism going forward. In time, Blues want to be saving money by producing a pipeline of talent capable of contributing at the highest levels for the team. But it is also about other elements.

Rigg says: “I will not shy away from the fact that there are three important parts of an Academy.

“Number one, get players into your first team.

“Number two, get a return on your investment. And if that means getting into your first team and moving on, as we have seen with some of our players like the Bellinghams and more recently Romelle Donovan and the likes, so be it.

“It's not a community scheme. This is where some

clubs get lost. We have to get them in the first team and/or a return on the investment.

“The third part is, because of the reality of football clubs, we have to make sure that every player who leaves us - because every player does eventually - is better equipped for life either in or outside football after their time at Birmingham City finishes.

“Hence our strapline: 'Committed to inspiring talented players and exceptional people'. That's our Academy. “The top priority is that we want to have players in our First Team. That's why our owners have made this commitment.

“You can see historically there are a lot of clubs who have paid lip service to academies, scrapped them, and then realised they had to keep an academy because they had a place in Europe, which is a requirement. “Our owners have got a completely different brief on it. They want to produce players, and we will never stop trying to improve in doing that.

“Being Cat One gets us in that elite group, this is the first stage.

**“There is no misunderstanding as an Academy staff because we got here, we cannot take our foot off pedal – there is still much, much more to be done.”**







# WOMEN'S PGA SUCCESS

## PROFESSIONAL GAME ACADEMY

The Academy structure at Blues Women has proven over time that it has solid foundations when it comes to producing talented players, and that was the case once again this season.

It was a successful campaign for our Professional Game Academy side.

The Under-21s, led by new Head Coach Georgia Clarke, beat Leicester City to win the PGA Cup. It was a dramatic final at Loughborough University Stadium.

Two goals from Millie Pullen and efforts by Lucy Powis and Emily Fitzpatrick put Blues in a strong position at 4-1 before Leicester rallied late on to make it 4-3.

It was the first time Blues had won the PGA Cup in the

competition's current guise. And it was an extra special moment for captain Layla Banaras to lift the trophy, having been at the Club since the age of eight. Goalkeeper Poppy Irvine was an important figure in the Final, making two crucial saves in a first-half that ended 1-1.

And her progress was rewarded with a first professional contract, while Ebonie Locke made her First Team debut in 2024/25.

A further three were part of First Team matchday squads.

The Under-16s, led by Jenny Hinton, finished runners-up in the PGA Plate Final.



WOMEN'S  
PROFESSIONAL  
GAME ACADEMY

U21 CUP FINAL 2024/25

# WINNERS





# ACADEMY HIGHLIGHTS

2024/25  
MEN

## FIRST TEAM

- First team debut for **Zaid Betteka**
- **Zaid Betteka, Byron Pendleton, Josh Home, Cody Pennington** all featured on the First Team bench in 2024/25

## LOANS

- There were a total of 23 loans to 12 different leagues across the world
- **Brandon Khela** helped Bradford City to promotion from League Two on loan
- **George Hall** and **Alfie Chang** started for Walsall on loan in the League Two Play-Off Final at Wembley
- **Tommy Fogarty** made 18 appearances for Dunfermline in the Scottish Championship on loan
- **Junior Dixon** won the National League South Play-Off with Boreham Wood on loan

## INTERNATIONAL BLUES

- **Menzi Mazwi** made his Zimbabwe debut in the COSAFA Cup against South Africa

- **Tommy Fogarty** represented Northern Ireland Under-21s
- **Zaid Betteka** debuted for Algeria Under-20s
- **Daniel Isichei** represented Ireland Under-19s
- **Femi Olofinjana** represented Norway Under-19s
- **Romelle Donovan** represented England Under-18s
- **Alfie Smith** made his England Under-15s debut

## SCHOOLBOYS

- **Alfie Smith**, at 14, became the youngest goalkeeper to play for Blues Under-18s
- For the first time, every Academy age group experienced either a domestic or foreign tour or tournament
- Blues Under-12s took part in the Matija Sarkic Memorial Tournament, hosted by the British School of Brussels
- Blues Under-14s competed in the prestigious Portimão Cup Tournament, Portugal
- The Club created and hosted the inaugural Blues Cup tournament for Under-15s
- Knighthead Performance Centre hosted Solihull Schools Cup Finals







# INFRASTRUCTURE

INFRASTRUCTURE, TRANSFORMATION & HIGH PERFORMANCE WITH NICK SMITH





**THERE HAS BEEN NO LET-UP IN THE WORK IMPROVING BLUES INFRASTRUCTURE, REVENUE OPPORTUNITIES AND HIGH-PERFORMANCE ENVIRONMENT.**

**THE BRIEF FOR NICK SMITH, BLUES HEAD OF INFRASTRUCTURE, CONTINUED TO BE WIDE-RANGING IN 2024/25 AND WAS IMPACTFUL ON ALL THESE FACETS.**

In June and over last summer, there was £15 million spent on 47 projects. That came on top of the £20 million invested the previous year.

Fan experience and facilities in and around St. Andrew's @ Knighthead Park moved to the next level. The Women's training centre and Boys Academy, the Knighthead Performance Centre, underwent a game-changing transformation.

"There was a lot of significant investment in our core infrastructure," Smith says. "This provided us with the foundations to grow and maximise how we deliver new experiences and revenue opportunities, some of which we never had before."

Six new corporate areas and restaurants were fitted out in an 11-week period, including The Alliance and the Box to Box area. In December, the City View was, in the Gil Merrick Stand, relaunched as the 12 lounge.

Large LED screens were fixed to the stands at either end of St. Andrew's and in-bowl Wi Fi was established

for fans, which enabled Blues to provide content to them before and in-match.

A DJ platform was constructed at the corner of the Tilton and Family Stand paddock to help get the ground rocking before kick-off. DJ Mikey B is now a cult hero amongst fans.

The concession areas and concourses were improved with the installation of digital screens, the introduction of a new food and beverage partner and the access to the stadium through new gates and turnstiles was upgraded.

"The amphitheatre in the Kop car park was created and we reorientated our club shop – which also had an upgrade fit out – so it faced the stadium, giving it a purpose and connecting with the fan zone and stadium arrival.

"So, again, that improved the fan experience and increased the retail opportunities for revenue." One of the most eagerly awaited facilities was the







Knighthead Fan Park on the Main Stand side of the ground.

Catering for up to 1,000 people, it provides live entertainment, hosting special guests including current and former players, as well as boasting two huge screens, fun activities for the whole family and a fantastic selection of food and drink.

Open at noon on a 3pm matchday and for an hour after the finish of a match, it quickly became the premier go-to place for fans. Oh, and Chairman Tom Wagner and Tom Brady have been known to drop in.

Smith comments: “It’s been a massive success. One, it attracts fans early; two, it distributes fans around the site so we don’t have everyone congregating only in the Kop car park; three, it provides a home for the fans and grows community and togetherness. It’s a wonderful experience.”



Mirroring the work at St. Andrew’s during 2024/25 has been the stunning enhancement of the Knighthead Performance Centre, which is in the West Heath area of the city.

“I bucket a lot of the work at the stadium into fan experience and into revenue opportunities,” says Smith.

“If we look at the other investment into the two training centres, the Elite Performance and Innovation Centre (EPIC) in Henley-in-Arden (where the Men’s First Team train) and at Wast Hills, that becomes around performance.

“So, identifying, growing and nurturing talent and performance on the pitch. There has been significant investment in both training centres but in terms of delivering the Category One Academy, it has been transformative.

“We have shown the football world that we are totally committed to the growth of the Club, the growth of



identifying and developing talent and we are now only one of 28 clubs who are Category One – and the only club to have achieved this from League One.

“And it’s not just a commitment to build stuff, it’s a commitment to the growth of players, growth of staff, increase in resources - and it’s an ongoing resource commitment.

**“So, for all those reasons, it’s a huge, transformative landmark for the Club.”**

It is staggering what has gone on at the Knighthead Performance Centre, which was gutted by a fire in March 2023. Smith jokes that Blues could easily have ‘handed back the keys’ after that damaging development. Instead, Blues pressed on and reimaged the whole site, befitting of a professional Women’s team and a Category One Academy. Around £5 million was spent.



A 900sq metre modular building was designed, developed and delivered within five months. It was connected into the existing building to make sure the flow of people and areas were specific to the Women and to the Academy boys and the associated staff of both.

New changing rooms, performance analysis, gym, medical and recovery areas were installed; more space was created for offices and classrooms through an education hub to provide support services to players and the Academy.

A new kitchen and dining area was created, and lounge areas were set aside for players.

Smith notes: “It was fascinating to watch: 18 months ago, the players were very disparate, there was no place for them to come together. They’d just leave after training. Now both the Women and the Academy have lounges, with such things like pool tables and table tennis, which creates a team ship and provides







an environment for the players and staff to feel safe and secure and focus on performance.”

Outside, a new artificial pitch was laid, lighting was improved and the indoor surface in the Dome was renovated. A hybrid ‘show’ pitch, to the same specifications as St. Andrew’s, was configured and stands with capacity for 250 people were built around it.

Blues also spent £500,000 on new equipment for grounds staff and a further £500,000 on the other pitches, including drainage.

Asked to sum up the events of the past year, Smith won’t get too excited as he says there is so much more yet to do and come.

“I try and be pragmatic when it comes to this kind of stuff. I would sum it up like that we have only just started. You can’t forget that we got relegated. What we achieved in the league was tremendous, but we have only just started.

“Yes, we have made significant investments to get out of it, we got record points, scored 100 goals, but we are kind of getting back to where we were. In the Championship.

**“We have great momentum; it is a journey we should enjoy together.**

“From here is where I would tell the story. All that great work has got us back, but we have put amazing

foundations in place and built wonderful momentum that allows us to go, at speed, from where we started.

“That’s all I want to caveat. We’re not in the Premier League yet. We’re not in the Champions League yet. There is a lot of hard work to do.

“But outstanding owners have invested an amazing amount of money in great products and services for the fans to come and have a wonderful time, see great football, and join us on this journey to where we want to be.

“There has been significant investment. We are going to continue to deliver great experiences, continue to provide wonderful opportunities for all the stakeholders across the Club to come and enjoy.”



# CATEGORY ONE INFRASTRUCTURE

Establishing a high-performance environment for players and staff has been a prime ambition for Blues owners since the day they arrived.

Knighthead want Blues to be the best they can be, on and off the pitch.

For Nick Smith, a man who has vast experience in helping clubs and organisations in all sports worldwide scale new heights, it’s integral.

As Head of Infrastructure, the improvement in facilities, resources and surroundings he has overseen has been tangible.

In particular, the upgrade in the Men’s training base, the Elite Performance and Innovation Centre (EPIC), in Henley-in-Arden, and the Knighthead Performance Centre, West Hills, could be described as eye-popping. The training grounds have never been this good in Blues entire history.

Such a factor is a big contributor towards setting standards and helping coaches, players and staff optimise their abilities. And it can provide Blues with an edge over their competitors, not least when it comes to securing young talent.

“We’re getting into a scenario where very quickly it is becoming an arms race for talent,” explains Smith. “As you move through the pyramid of football your pull becomes less and less in regards the talent you can source, acquire and develop.

“So, then it comes down to other factors. If I am a parent and I have got a talented child, where am I going to put him or her? I have got a limited window of opportunity to allow my child to flourish.

“So, you consider: does the club have the best coaching? Does the club have the best technical capability? Does the club have the best facilities? Does the club have the best welfare and security? “One thing is finding that talent and then it’s what you do with that talent.

“This arms race for talent is real and people are attracted to great facilities and resources to help that talent to flourish and fulfil their potential.

“That’s why it is so significant, what we are doing at the training grounds, becoming a Category One Academy, it really is. It should never be lost just how significant.”





BIRMINGHAM CITY FOOTBALL CLUB

2024/25 REVIEW OF THE YEAR

# COMMERCIAL AND PARTNERSHIPS

MARQUEE NAMES AND INNOVATION WITH JOSH DAVIS & MARTIN HEALY

OFFICIAL AIRLINE OF BIRMINGHAM CITY FOOTBALL CLUB.

DELTA

OFFICIAL AIRLINE OF BIRMINGHAM CITY



DELTA







## IT MIGHT BE A STRETCH TO LINK THE GREAT ELLA FITZGERALD AND BLUES BUT, PLEASE, HEAR THIS OUT.

As the First Lady of Song says, it isn't where you came from, it's where you're going that counts.

No doubt, that is applicable to the Club, which has now had two years of inspiring ownership by Knighthead. For Blues partnership sales leads Josh Davis and Martin Healy it is certainly about looking forward at the exciting possibilities ahead, even after another season of commercial improvement which saw the Club add high profile brands like Delta Air Lines and Vertu to the roster.

### And it is about doing things differently than before to help keep the upward momentum going.

Davis, who joined Blues in October as Senior Partnerships Manager, says: "The Club is firmly focused on the future and the opportunity that lies ahead. Our priority is to continually evolve and elevate our product.

"One of the most important things when looking to grow commercial partners is to understand the narrative around the Football Club, what makes us a unique proposition?

"As a Club, we are in the exciting position of having several powerful narratives converging at once. The transformative impact of Knighthead's leadership and the bold vision for the Sports Quarter and shaping the future of Birmingham. Add to that the Tom Brady effect, raising our global profile and the incredible momentum we are seeing across all areas of the Club, driven by enthusiastic and passionate fan support and growing engagement.

"Beyond football, Birmingham itself is on the rise. As the UK's second-largest city and the most youthful city in Europe, we are seeing increasing interest from blue-chip businesses choosing to make Birmingham their home. That energy mirrors what is happening here at the Club.

"St. Andrew's @ Knighthead Park stands as a symbol of that ambition, Premier League ready and a continuously evolving fan experience. The upgrades to the stadium are not just physical; they're foundational to the kind of experience we're creating.

"When potential partners step inside, they feel the atmosphere, and witness first-hand our unwavering fan-first approach. The experience speaks for itself.

"We saw this when the CEO of a huge global business, looked to me at the final home game of the season, with the fans waving the scarves above their head and said: 'I'm very lucky to have been to World Cup finals, Champions League finals, the biggest games in the world, but I have honestly never experienced anything like this.'

"The calibre of brands we now have the opportunity to engage with is genuinely exciting. But we are operating in a highly competitive environment.

"To meet that challenge, we've completely reimaged our presentation materials that brings the Birmingham City story to life. But that's only the first step.

"The real impact comes when we align our story with the ambitions of the brand in front of us. One of the most insightful questions we ask is: 'If you were running this Club, what would you do for your business?'

### "This opens the door to a deeper understanding of their objectives, challenges, and aspirations."

Davis continues "We have grown significantly our commercial partners. We have more, we have bigger brands, and we are generating considerably more revenue.

"We have a data led model, that allows us to continue to elevate an already strong portfolio of partners - including Delta Air Lines, the second-largest airline in America; Coral, one of the UK's largest and most reputable betting brands and part of the Entain Group; Vertu, a major UK-based car dealership group; and University of Birmingham, one of the world's leading learning institutions. All were brought on board in 2024/25, securing partnerships and revenue levels that League One has never seen before."

## BLUES COMMERCIAL ARM BECAME MORE INNOVATIVE IN 2024/25 AROUND ACTIVATION AND CONTENT.

Traditionally, the premium sponsorship opportunities in football centre around kit assets – front of shirt, sleeve, back of shirt and back of shorts. But Blues have been identifying and developing new non-kit assets.

The increased media and broadcast attention on the Club, as well as a '365-day-a-year content business', driven by Blues social media channels, Club app and website, has resulted in the development of a 'robust content production strategy' to help towards that end. Bespoke content is now part of the partnership packages. One such was when Vertu linked with the Birmingham City Foundation to unveil their new car and racing livery for the 2025 British Touring Car Championship season at the Knighthead Performance Centre as the training ground hosted the Vertu Primary Schools Cup.

One of the most eye-catching developments of the season came with the news that Blues are the subject of an Amazon Prime documentary, with Steven Knight and Matt Alvarez as Executive Producers.

It's a behind-the-scenes look at the Blues comeback story post-relegation from the Championship, as well as a focus on the local community.





With Tom Brady at the forefront, the revenue-generating opportunities from it and wider interest in the Club will mushroom.

"It's huge," admits Healy, Blues Head of Partnership Sales. "I think we are going to see a couple of things from it.

"Firstly, Birmingham City fans from all over the world seeing behind the scenes of their favourite club. They'll all tune in. That's great for us to continue to engage the existing fan base.

**"What's really exciting is how many people are going to get exposed to Birmingham City Football Club for the first time.**

"And I wouldn't be surprised if our biggest markets outside the UK will be the US and north Asia.

"Every football club within the Premier League are looking to commercially unlock those markets and to say that as a Club we are starting to do that organically is a real strong narrative.

"Additionally, this type of product allows us to unlock non-traditional football fans that we expect to tune in because of Tom Brady's association to the Club.

"In fact, I think we will pick up a lot of the American Football audience. Soccer is growing at pace in the country so now we have a chance to have them

become the next wave of Birmingham City FC fans.

"And then you have Asia which has grown because we are fortunate to have the likes of Paik, from South Korea, who is not only great on the pitch, but his personal commercial profile is growing exponentially. We have a similar situation developing with Tomoki Iwata from Japan.

**"I am excited about all these new audiences that we are going to pick up and the opportunities this provides the Club.**



"Ultimately, Birmingham City's commercial vision is clear: evolve, innovate, and lead. We have bold ambitions, growing global momentum, and have worked hard to revitalise our partnership model. It's important that the true measure of success will not be reflected solely by us becoming a commercial powerhouse but by becoming the benchmark for what football clubs can achieve in the modern era."

## COMMERCIAL ATTRACTION

The improvements in Blues corporate, fan facilities and resources in and around St. Andrew's @ Knighthead Park have helped lift the Club's commercial enterprise.

New restaurants and bars came on stream this season while existing ones were revamped to higher specifications. This provides a wide range of dining and drinking experiences at all price points.

The Fan Park was established to entice more supporters to the stadium earlier and for longer, and to enhance the togetherness.

All aspects have contributed to completely changing the way St. Andrew's @ Knighthead Park is viewed, as well as the feel and atmosphere around the Club - this has not been lost on potential sponsors, partners and stakeholders.









## THE BIRMINGHAM CITY FOUNDATION CONTINUES TO GO FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH, POSITIVELY AFFECTING THE LIVES OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY. FOUNDATION DIRECTOR ANTONY ISHERWOOD IS LEADING THE TEAM RESPONSIBLE FOR THE INCREDIBLE WORK THAT HAS TAKEN PLACE OVER THE PAST 12 MONTHS.

For Birmingham City Foundation, a season of incredible hard work has provided tangible results.

Lives have been positively impacted. The reputation of the Foundation has grown. And this has created new opportunities to do even more.

"The last 12 months has been absolutely fantastic," he says. "In terms of the charity and the impact we are having, it has gone 100mph. Like everything else at the Club under the ownership of Knighthead!

"This past year, we have engaged with 39,000 people across Foundation specific programmes.

"If I take you back to where we were two years ago, before Knighthead came in, we were doing some really good work then but we were stand alone, 'surviving' as a charity. We were probably working with 3,700 people a year.

"Whilst we have still got some deep and meaningful projects we had back then, our whole programme growth and the variety of what we offer has been transformed. And this is what is having such a positive impact on the community. "Our reputation now, within our community and with our key stakeholders, is very good. You could phone up any of our school academies or school partners and say 'what are your thoughts on the Foundation?' and honestly, they'd reply 'above and beyond, truly amazing'. That's the mindset we are working with now. This creates opportunities to do more.

"The EFL Trust is now using us as a good example of service and delivery. While the Premier League keep coming to us now for joint ventures.

"One of the big benefits and positives of this year is that we have built that trust with the community and the partners. They believe in everything they are hearing from the Club because we are delivering it."

An example of that has been seen in one of the Foundation's flagship initiatives, the academy school model.

"We put two, full-time Birmingham City branded staff into a school of need. They are there every day of the week from 8am to 8pm.

"At our second academy, Ark Victoria, we are now seen as a fantastic neighbour in the community, in Small Heath. It is one of the largest schools within the city. There are 1,900 pupils from reception up to year 11.

"The two lads we have there are representative of the local community. The work they have done and in helping to create a sense of belonging has been immense.

"We have built a rapport with all of the parents because they know the school is saying they trust Birmingham City to come in and work within their setting. And because we have built that trust, we are now doing walking football in the evenings, the parents and grandparents are coming. We are doing keep fit classes for women only due to the cultural barriers.

**"The amount of engagement, front-facing, across the city we are having, utilising our academy school partnerships, has gone from strength to strength."**

This follows on from the remarkable turnaround in the first school to benefit from Blues involvement, Balaam Wood Academy, in Frankley.

They jumped two rankings to Good after an OFSTED inspection. And the Fairer Schools Index, which ranks the 3,091 schools in England, provided another accolade: Balaam Wood rose 1,601 places in the list, making them the most improved schools in the Midlands and fifth most nationally.

October marked another milestone for the Foundation with the opening of their Community Hub in Emmeline Street, in the shadow of St. Andrew's @ Knighthead Park just behind the Gil Merrick Stand.

The Hub provides a safe space for a host of activities, help and advice, including drop-in sessions for all age groups. A mental health talking club takes place there, as well as provision for retirees and a Brew with Blues morning, to tackle loneliness.

"The variety of work through the Community Hub is based upon the need at that time," says Isherwood. "And it is so diverse. The other night, we had a cooking club for care

leaders. A renowned local celebrity chef from within the South Asian community came down.

"When we are leaving the offices at St. Andrew's on a Thursday, we bump into parents who are collecting their kids from the youth club.

"Parents know the staff by first names. There's now a relationship and rapport. It just shows the distance we have travelled in two years. We have become integrated into our local community. This was one of our key goals."

The Foundation intends to grow from 32 full-time staff to 45 next season. Isherwood notes: "When I came seven years ago there was me and one other person!

"The Trust, as it was back then, was in the doldrums. There was nothing left.

"We started again. In a very, very busy city where there are lots of foundations run through professional football clubs. We were the newbies.

**"We are now on the rise. By this time next year we will be the biggest football club Foundation in the Midlands."**







# FOUNDATION HIGHLIGHTS

## BIRMINGHAM CITY FOUNDATION'S KICKS PROGRAMME 'HAS GONE THROUGH THE ROOF', SAYS ANTONY ISHERWOOD.

It has become one of the charity's main drivers in helping young people in the city who are at risk.

Blues offer seven free sessions of organised football and mentoring for eight to 18-year-olds per week as part of a nationwide scheme.

The addition of Steve Davies to lead the project has provided a significant boost. "Since Knighthead took over, like everyone else at the Club, we have looked to raise standards by upskilling people or bringing in the best", says Isherwood, Blues Foundation Director.

"We got Steve in from Arsenal, where he had been for 10 years. He's an experienced guy who has worked in juvenile detention centres in London.

"This year he's taken groups of lads on the edge of crime and turned them into teams and helped them to develop and grow.

"Our 14-year-olds have gone with Steve to Arsenal, Liverpool and Manchester City to play competitions. Not only did they go to these places, which create aspirational targets for them, but they won.

"The success isn't just the winning on the pitch though. The success is that you have got this group of lads who, at times, have been with gangs and had divisions, who are talking to one another and coming together."

Another of the Foundation's major accomplishments has centred around their Pan Disability programme.

It offers boys and girls with a wide range of physical, learning, or sensory disabilities the chance to play football, make friendships and have fun.

Isherwood says: "We were very fortunate this season that that Men's and Women's players donated a percentage of their win bonuses, and that enabled us to go to the next level.

"Paul Hunt, who heads up Pan Disability, is determined that we become the best organisation to deliver disability sport, full stop.

"We are going to do Powerchair football, we are doing Cerebral Palsy football, we will do a Down's Syndrome team as well. All these programmes provide opportunities and accessibility to football. That's one of the key drivers from the Club viewpoint - give football for all."

The Foundation have plans to expand their successful academy schools roster.

Balaam Wood in Frankley became the first Blues Academy School, followed by Ark Victoria in Small Heath.

Blues provide full-time coaches to their school partners. They mentor young people, provide numeracy and literacy support, deliver PE and football coaching and embark on targeted intervention and pastoral welfare.

"The traction we are getting is incredible," Isherwood comments. "We will be launching academy school three very soon and then school four is coming on board in September. In October, we will have academy school five."

Fundraising, charity and community events, like the popular Blues Fest at St. Andrew's @ Knighthead Park, have continued to be a staple of the Foundation's activities.

At Christmas, there's Blue Nose Day, the culmination of a concerted effort to help people in the city and spread some festive cheer.

"We distributed 12,000 presents across the course of a week, around the city. That was primarily run through the Foundation staff. We had the Club staff involved as well and we even had Jeremy Dale delivering presents at one stage because we needed bodies to help us get the stuff out there, there was so much!"





# THE RISE AND RISE OF THE OFFICIAL SUPPORTERS CLUB

A YEAR OF GROWTH AT HOME AND AROUND THE GLOBE





# THE OFFICIAL SUPPORTERS CLUB – OSC – CONTINUES TO GO FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH. WE CAUGHT UP WITH ITS CHAIRMAN, SUKH SINGH, WHO WAS RE-ELECTED TO A FRESH TERM IN MAY, TO DETAIL THE MAIN DEVELOPMENTS THIS PAST SEASON.

## Now into a second full season, how has the OSC grown and developed?

We have grown the branches from pretty much a handful to 72 since we formed. And we have 7,000 paid members now. It's been remarkable.

I've been amazed, to be honest, just how big Birmingham City is worldwide. It's not just branches locally and in England, but it's everywhere – America, into Europe, to Australia and New Zealand.

The Birmingham City football family is huge and the OSC is a great way of helping to bring everyone together and connect them, with one another but also the Club.

The Women's OSC was important to us this season. Our branch leader Stacey Mason has been building the membership and raising the profile of our Women's team. It has become very popular.

## What kind of events and activities did the OSC stage; a lot of charity work was undertaken, notably on behalf of the Birmingham City Foundation?

We organise OSC events and we also help to get OSC members to join in and support the Club organised events.

The sleep out at Christmas, as part of the Blue Nose Day and weekend activities, was a big thing for us. It

generated £95,000 and the Club matched it, so everyone together raised nearly £200,000 for the Foundation. An incredible sum.

It was a little different, as well, to previous years. A lot of the Club staff got involved and we had Craig Gardner, Chris Davies and Jeremy Dale sleeping out in the stadium with us. We had a major toy appeal at Christmas, too, and an appeal for canned food. We were inundated, which just shows you how caring our fans are. We have been helping to feed the homeless every Tuesday evening, as well.

The litter pick we did in August was very successful and something we will be doing again. We had 250 people cleaning up the area around St. Andrew's @ Knighthead Park. It made a big difference.

What was nice was that people in the community would come out of their houses and say things like 'thank you, the Club is really doing something for us'. Interactions like that made you realise that even what you might consider a small thing can go a long way.



I think in the main, over the season, it was about all the get-togethers as well as the outreach programmes. You'd see it in the fan zones around the ground. There was an awful lot of engagement going on. Various branch members would arrange to meet up before games. But it wasn't just the OSC. All fans came together around the ground, supporting and helping with the entertainment, creating such a great atmosphere.

Such social interaction, with fellow Blues fans, is so important to so many people, you sometimes forget. Our one common denominator is Blues.

## How does the OSC liaise with the Club?

We have a very good relationship with all the senior figures at Blues. I think something not many people are aware of is that after every match, we prepare a document that contains feedback from both our members and non-members about their experiences and send it in. The Club digest it and we have







dialogue about what might need improving, what has worked, and so on.

The Club have actively listened and tried to help all season over various suggestions. It's about working together to try to improve everything about the fan experience, the stadium, and resolve any problems that may arise.

Another thing is that if someone has an issue, they can come to us and we can sort it a lot easier and a lot quicker. The Club really appreciates having one main point of contact.

Because we have created alliances at the Club we know who to contact and can make a phone call, putting them in touch with the right people. We have helped loads of people in this way, and not just OSC members.

### Can you talk a little about the branch meetings that are held regularly throughout the season?

These are important and enjoyable social events. Again, it's a chance for like-minded Blues fans to meet up and connect.

What has been nice has been the support given by the Club. We have had great turnouts to branch meetings from various people. Chris Davies, Craig Gardner, Hope Powell, Amy Merricks, Jeremy Dale, John Clarke, have been to branch meetings to meet members and chat. Tom Ross too, and he has helped bring former players like Paul Devlin, Paul Tait,

Malcolm Page. Lukas Jutkiewicz, as well, has been a guest.

In these past two years we've found that many of the naysayers who were sceptical about us initially have changed their tune. I think there's a more informed realisation what the OSC is about. It's a collaboration with the Club, run by fans for fans.

We have a mascot at every single Men's game, flag bearers, there have been stadium tours galore for members. We had 400 fans taking part in the second Alliance Cup as part of a Bank Holiday festival of football – what a treat to play on the same pitch as our heroes! The OSC is a great community.

### From a fans' perspective, what has this season been like following Blues?

Just as a fan it's been insane. It's been like the Barry Fry season (1994/95), when I fell in love with Blues. It's been so enjoyable.

We've just won so many games. We only lost three league games on the Men's side of it – crazy.

What Chris Davies and the team did was amazing. And we saw how well the Women performed under Amy Merricks and how close they came to promotion, with more and more fans going to watch them

Our goal for this coming season is to have even more supporters get behind Amy and team and do our bit to help them win the league.







# LEGENDS RETIRE

LUKAS JUTKIEWICZ AND LOUISE QUINN HANG UP THEIR BOOTS







# BIDDING FAREWELL

**IT WAS TIME TO SAY  
GOODBYE TO A PAIR OF  
BLUES STALWARTS IN MAY  
AS STRIKER LUKAS  
JUTKIEWICZ AND DEFENDER  
LOUISE QUINN ANNOUNCED  
THEIR RETIREMENTS FROM  
FOOTBALL.**

Both left the game as modern-day Club legends. For Jutkiewicz, it ended nine years of leading from the front in redoubtable fashion at Blues, often amid turbulent times.

He joined initially on loan from Burnley in August 2016 and the move became permanent four months later.

He played under 15 different managers at Blues, whether permanent or interim, and his influence

extended beyond his exploits on the pitch. Jutkiewicz, 36, established himself as a senior squad leader and was the embodiment of what it meant to represent the Club when it came to engagement with the local community.

He proudly sits in the top 15 for all-time Blues appearances with 358. He scored 69 goals and was the Club's top-scorer in three different seasons (2016/17, 2019/20 and 2020/21), often producing vital contributions as Blues battled relegation.

One of the most magical moments of a memorable season for Blues came in April when Jutkiewicz delighted St. Andrew's @ Knighthead Park by netting what would be his last goal, in the 6-2 defeat of Barnsley.

Quinn was Blues Women's Team and later Club Captain and, like Jutkiewicz, a leader on and off the pitch, who was always at the forefront of work within the local community.

Quinn, 35, joined Blues four years ago after a stint in Italy with Fiorentina. She quickly established herself as a heartbeat of Blues side, during what were testing periods for the team.

Quinn made 85 appearances for Blues and scored 14 times. Although a commanding presence at the back, she bagged the top-scorer award in the 2021/22 season.

The last of her 122 Ireland caps came in June, and she played every minute of her country's games in their first ever World Cup appearance in 2023.







# CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

**TOM WAGNER**





## BIRMINGHAM CITY FC COMMUNITY,

THE PAST YEAR HAS BEEN A TRANSFORMATIVE CHAPTER FOR BIRMINGHAM CITY FOOTBALL CLUB. FROM HISTORIC ACHIEVEMENTS ON THE PITCH TO MAJOR STRIDES BEHIND THE SCENES, THE PROGRESS WE'VE MADE IS A CREDIT TO EVERY PERSON CONNECTED TO THIS CLUB INCLUDING OUR PLAYERS, STAFF, PARTNERS, AND SUPPORTERS. I WANT TO SINCERELY THANK ALL OF YOU FOR THE BELIEF, COMMITMENT, AND ENERGY YOU'VE BROUGHT TO THIS JOURNEY.

Now, we look ahead.

This coming season marks the 150th anniversary of our great Club. Throughout the year, we'll celebrate not only the legacy of those who came before us, but the incredible opportunity we have to shape what comes next. That future is being built on the back of real momentum — including a record-breaking points total in the Men's campaign and a dominant title run that reminded everyone what Birmingham City is capable of.

For the upcoming season, success means pushing for promotion across both our Men's and Women's teams. It means continuing to invest in our Category One Academy and PGA pathways, ensuring the next generation of Blues talent is developed at the highest level. It means strengthening our leadership off the pitch, as we've done with the appointments of Jeremy Dale as CEO and other new additions too.

We want Birmingham City to become a destination club - one that excites global partners and attracts forward-thinking businesses who believe in where we're headed. That same spirit of growth extends to our work in the community. We're committed to expanding the reach of the Birmingham City Foundation, creating more opportunities and support for young people across this city.

We also know that our story deserves to be shared on a larger stage. Through the upcoming Amazon Prime docuseries, we'll bring the heart and ambition of Birmingham City to a global audience — inviting new fans on every continent to join the journey. And as we grow that following, we're also laying the groundwork

for the future of the Club itself — pushing ahead with the design and planning of the Sports Quarter, a cornerstone of our long-term vision.

The season will begin at St. Andrew's @ Knighthead Park with a powerful moment, the Trevor Francis Memorial Game and statue unveiling. From there, we get down to the business of our Championship campaign and what a way to start as we host Ipswich Town, in front of the TV cameras, on a Friday night, in what promises to be a packed and noisy season-opener.

With your support and voices, St. Andrew's @ Knighthead Park will remain a fortress.

**Birmingham is on the rise.**

**Keep Right On.**

Tom Wagner







# BIRMINGHAM. ON THE RISE AGAIN

**KEEP RIGHT ON!**



BIRMINGHAM CITY FOOTBALL CLUB



CHAMPIONS 2025

