# Arsenal Women’s move to Emirates risks sidelining community roots and social progress



It has been 40 years since Arsenal in the Community was established—a programme rooted in socialist ideals that sought to uplift the most disadvantaged and foster community resilience. Yet, rather than celebrating this milestone, one cannot help but scrutinise the club’s increasingly commercialised ventures into women’s football, which seem more about glitzy displays and stadium spectacles than genuine social progress. The decision to host all Arsenal Women’s Super League (WSL) home games at the Emirates Stadium next season, ostensibly to “bring the team back to its roots,” appears more a calculated move to maximise ticket revenues rather than a sincere effort to support grassroots development or social upliftment. This new venue, with a capacity exceeding 60,000, risks turning women’s football into yet another corporate showcase, detached from the community origins that once defined the club’s social conscience.

The story of Arsenal Women was born amidst a backdrop of systemic neglect—an era when opportunities for women and girls to play football were practically nonexistent. Freddie Hudson, who has dedicated 37 years to community work with the club, recalls how the club responded to the lack of access by running programmes in local schools, reflecting a true commitment to social change. But today's focus on staging matches at the Emirates and peddling ticket sales seems a far cry from those humble beginnings. Instead of nurturing accessible pathways for ordinary girls—especially from disadvantaged backgrounds—the club now appears more interested in capitalising on a burgeoning market of supporters, many of whom are drawn to the spectacle rather than the social mission. The recent rise in attendance figures doesn’t implicitly translate into greater social equity; it threatens to turn women’s football into yet another commodified entertainment franchise.

Rachel Yankey’s pioneering journey exemplifies the barriers that existed and persist for young female players from working-class communities. Growing up in Brent earlier this decade, Yankey had to disguise herself as a boy just to participate in football—a stark reminder of how far we still are from true equality. Her success, despite these obstacles, highlights the resilience of grassroots players, yet it also starkly contrasts with the current club’s emphasis on marketing and spectacle. Yankey’s foundation continues to push for community-based mentorship and opportunities that genuinely empower girls, especially those facing socio-economic hardships. This grassroots activism underscores the hollow nature of the current emphasis on “elite” success, stadium attendances, and corporate partnerships that benefit shareholders more than the communities that built the sport.

Inside Haverstock School, the community-driven initiatives that once sought to give young girls a voice and a platform now seem subordinate to institutional branding and media-driven narratives. Abby Webster’s testimony about fostering belonging and confidence reflects a far more meaningful social engagement than any stadium spectacle. Meanwhile, Arsenal’s management—lavish with awards and publicised successes—often appears disconnected from the realities faced by the very communities they claim to serve. Football, in the eyes of the club’s executives and owners, has become a vehicle for profit, and their social responsibilities are often reduced to image building rather than actual empowerment.

On the pitch, Arsenal Women’s recent resurgence, culminating in an 18-year drought-breaking European title, is cheered as a triumph of the club’s sporting prowess. Yet, this success is undermined by the hollow nature of the commercial ambitions behind the move to the Emirates. The club’s claims of “supporting sustainable growth” mask a broader trend: prioritising media rights, ticket sales, and corporate sponsorships over meaningful community engagement. It’s a spectacle that risks turning women’s football into a venue for corporate branding rather than a platform for social empowerment, especially for those from underprivileged backgrounds.

Furthermore, the grandeur of hosting matches at the Emirates, while ostensibly a celebration of progress, rings hollow when many local girls still face financial hardship, lack of access, and social barriers to participation. The club claims to aim for “diversity,” yet too often, the policies seem driven more by image than genuine inclusion. Talent pathways remain predominantly middle-class constructs, and the club’s focus on academy success overlooks the socio-economic realities many girls face—barriers that cannot be overcome simply by playing in a larger stadium.

It’s clear that Arsenal’s women’s football journey, although celebrated in corporate circles, remains rooted in contradictions. A club once committed to social justice has now aligned itself with brand expansion rather than community upliftment. The return to the Emirates symbolises a pivotal moment—if it is to mean anything, it must serve as a rallying point for genuine social change, not just a backdrop for corporate profits. Only through truly inclusive programmes, rooted in community needs, can football truly become a vehicle for social progress—something that appears increasingly distant amid the club’s commercial ambitions.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2025/jun/16/we-took-a-big-leap-of-faith-how-a-community-project-built-arsenal-women> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2025/jun/16/we-took-a-big-leap-of-faith-how-a-community-project-built-arsenal-women> - This article celebrates the 40th anniversary of Arsenal in the Community, the club's initiative that founded the women's team. It highlights the team's return to the Emirates Stadium for all Women's Super League games, symbolising a reconnection with their roots. The piece also covers the team's recent success in winning the Champions League after an 18-year wait, marking a significant year for Arsenal.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/sports/soccer/arsenal-play-all-wsl-home-games-emirates-stadium-2025-06-10/> - Arsenal Women's team announced they will host all 11 of their 2025-26 Women's Super League (WSL) home matches at the 60,704-capacity Emirates Stadium, marking a significant step in growing support for women's football. This follows a successful season where they averaged 34,110 fans per WSL home game and sold over 415,000 tickets—a 20% increase from the previous year. The club will also offer season tickets for the first time. While WSL games move to Emirates, some Women's Champions League, FA Cup, and League Cup matches will remain at Meadow Park.
4. <https://www.fourfourtwo.com/news/i-had-to-pretend-to-be-a-boy-to-play-football-there-still-arent-enough-inner-city-girls-coming-through-and-getting-opportunities-arsenal-and-lionesses-legend-unveils-plan-to-break-down-barriers-in-womens-game> - Rachel Yankey, former Arsenal and England football star, shared her journey of overcoming barriers as a young girl passionate about football. Growing up in Brent, north-west London, she had to disguise herself as a boy to join a football team due to a lack of opportunities for girls in the late 1980s. Despite her success—earning 129 England caps and becoming a European champion with Arsenal—Yankey remains concerned about limited access for inner-city girls in football today. To address these issues, Yankey launched the Rachel Yankey Foundation, creating community hubs in Brent and Westminster for girls aged 11 to 16. These hubs offer mentorship, coaching, and a safe, accessible environment to play and develop in football. She emphasizes the importance of supporting girls not just as athletes but in other aspects of football, including journalism, coaching, and photography. The foundation aims to break down current barriers, provide training and educational assistance, and inspire local youth through accessible programming and diverse opportunities.
5. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/articles/c3gvvx898l5o> - Arsenal women have sold out Emirates Stadium twice this season. Arsenal women will use Emirates Stadium as their main home ground from the start of next season's Women's Super League. The north London venue will stage eight WSL matches and three group games in the Women's Champions League if Arsenal reach that stage. Should Arsenal progress to the knockout stages of the European competition, those matches would also be played at the Emirates, the club announced on Tuesday. The WSL team's other matches, including domestic cup games, will be played at Meadow Park, which has been their longstanding home. Arsenal recorded an average attendance of 52,029, which included two sell-outs and three WSL attendance records, across six women's matches at the 60,704-capacity Emirates Stadium this season. Arsenal sporting director Edu said: "There's great passion for our women's team right across our club. We are one club, with a vision to win major trophies across our men's and women's teams. This move supports this ambition and we can't wait to continue this amazing journey with our supporters."
6. <https://www.standard.co.uk/sport/football/arsenal-women-emirates-stadium-main-home-b1157572.html> - Arsenal have sold out all their games at that ground, which has a capacity of around 3,000, this season and the club has always had a long-term aim of playing more matches at the Emirates. The Gunners had two sell-outs at the Emirates this season and set three WSL attendance records. "For almost four decades, we’ve been at the forefront of the women’s game," said Arsenal CEO Vinai Venkatesham. "We’ve recently seen extraordinary growth in supporters coming to Emirates Stadium for games held here, which include two complete sell-outs this season. The next step in our journey is to make Emirates Stadium our main home for Arsenal Women. We’re looking forward to giving more supporters the chance to watch our women’s team play. This is part of a collective drive across the club to take the women's game forward and support sustainable growth of the game so it can thrive in the long term." Across the Emirates and Mangata Pay UK Stadium, Arsenal have had an average crowd of 32,618 this season. Head coach Jonas Eidevall is excited to beat that number next season and believes the size of the support can be a huge boost to the team.
7. <https://www.insideworldfootball.com/2024/05/14/arsenal-women-migrate-60700-capacity-emirates-stadium-main-home-base/> - The Gunners scored an average attendance of 52,029, which included two sell-outs and three WSL attendance records, across six women’s matches at the 60,704-capacity Emirates Stadium this season. Vinai Venkatesham, chief executive officer, continued: "For almost four decades, we’ve been at the forefront of the women’s game. We’ve recently seen extraordinary growth in supporters coming to Emirates Stadium for games held here, which include two complete sell-outs this season. The next step in our journey is to make Emirates Stadium our main home for Arsenal Women. We’re looking forward to giving more supporters the chance to watch our women’s team play. This is part of a collective drive across the club to take the women's game forward and support sustainable growth of the game so it can thrive in the long term." Arsenal will host Brighton at Meadow Park for the last WSL fixture of the season on Saturday. At present, the team is in third place but could jump up to second if Chelsea slip up.