

‘Winning is the only thing that matters’

Down and out: England finished in fourth place after losing to Sweden on Saturday.

Is Phil Neville right? The coach of the England women’s team said his team did not deserve a heroes’ welcome because they had failed. But they have been part of a triumph for women’s sport...

In the end the Netherlands’ defences were breached. A cool penalty from US Captain **Megan Rapinoe** broke through the heroic goalkeeper’s defence. Less than 10 minutes later, striker Rose Lavelle sealed their place as World Cup champions for the second tournament in a row.

Love them or loathe them, the USA have been the stars throughout. They scored a record 13 goals against Thailand in their opening match. Striker Alex Morgan went viral when she pretended to sip a cup of tea after scoring against England.

Off the pitch, Rapinoe has been locked in a war of words with President Donald Trump. Before her team had even won this weekend, she said that “not many, if any” of them would visit the White House to celebrate. The comments came a week after Trump tweeted that she should “WIN first before she TALKS!” and “never disrespect our Country”.

Elsewhere, there were signs that women’s football has finally had its watershed moment. A **third** of Dutch viewers watched the Netherlands’ semi-final against Sweden. TV ratings records were set in France, Brazil and Italy.

In England, where women’s football was **banned** until 1971, the Lionesses have become household names. Their semi-final attracted 11.7 million viewers; more than half of England’s televisions were tuned in to the match.

And yet, coach **Phil Neville** said his team did not deserve a heroes’ welcome. He turned down several offers to celebrate the players when they returned to Britain yesterday.

“They don’t want it; they’ve not earned it,” Neville said. “A bus-top tour or a trip to **Downing Street** would be celebrating failure [...]. You’ve got to win. If we’re having open-top bus tours round Trafalgar Square for finishing fourth, that’s sending totally the wrong message to my players.”

He went on, “The texts coming through of ‘you’ve inspired the nation’ have been lovely, but annoying because we wanted to win. I’ve been brought up where winning is the only thing that matters.”

It’s the taking part?

Neville is right, say some. No one should not get a trophy just for taking part — that is no way to encourage competition. The USA won because they were the best team, but they also had the strongest attitude: losing was simply not an option. Call it arrogant or ambitious, you cannot deny the results.

But is winning *really* the only thing that matters? The Lionesses have inspired countless girls (and boys!) to get involved in women’s football, either as players or fans. They are not just amazing athletes — after years of being sidelined, they are now feminist role models. They thoroughly deserve to be celebrated.

YOU DECIDE

1. Is winning all that matters?
2. Do female football stars deserve the same pay as men?

ACTIVITIES

1. Complete the following sentence with your own thoughts: “It’s not the winning, it’s...”
2. Using the links under Become an Expert, write a timeline of the history of women’s football over the last 100 years.

SOME PEOPLE SAY...

“You can’t win unless you learn how to lose.”

Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, US basketball player

What do you think?

Q & A

What do we know?

It is the fourth time that the USA has won the Women's World Cup, and the first time that they have won two tournaments back-to-back. Megan Rapinoe won the Golden Boot (the award for the most goals), with six goals and three assists. (Striker Alex Morgan had achieved the same, but had spent more time on the pitch.) The Netherlands's Sari van Veenendaal won the Golden Gloves award for the best goalkeeper.

What do we not know?

Whether the excitement around women's football will continue now that the tournament is over. There have been "watershed moments" (significant turning points) before, like in 1999 when the USA narrowly beat China, only for interest to wane again in the years that followed.

WORD WATCH

Megan Rapinoe

The pink-haired, 34-year-old captain also helped lead the US women's team to World Cup victory in 2015. She is openly gay and has campaigned for LGBT rights. She was the first white athlete to kneel during the US national anthem after Colin Kaepernick began doing so as a protest against racism. Rapinoe has not sung the US national anthem before games during this World Cup, and says she will "probably" never sing it again.

Third

Five million people in total.

Banned

Women's football in England was more popular than the men's game during World War One, because the fittest young male players were sent off to war. The Football Association banned the women's game in 1921, saying it was "quite unsuitable for females and ought not to be encouraged".

Phil Neville

A former England, Everton and Manchester United footballer. He was made coach of the England women's team in January, last year.

Downing Street

Number 10 Downing Street is the home of the UK's prime minister. When the women's team returned home after losing the 2015 World Cup, they were invited to Kensington Palace.

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