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OVERTIME

SPORTS MAGAZINE

FLEETWOOD...

IN DUBAI

THE DUBAI CODS

**REPRESENTING FYLDE
COASTERS IN THE GULF**

WATER POLO'S

NEW ERA

THE LANCS WOMEN

HELPING GB ACHIEVE

BEST EVER RESULTS

PLUS NINE-DART

MADNESS

OLDHAM ARE BACK

**MIKE FORD ON ROUGHYEDS
LEAGUE ONE PROMOTION HOPES**



WELCOME

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EDITOR'S NOTES

Welcome back and thank you for the support received on our debut issue.

This week we have new stories, new features and new ways to compete with our expert panel of writers.

In this second issue we have an exciting feature about Fleetwood Town's very own team in the city of Dubai and how a water polo team that almost went bust 10 years ago is now competing in the World Championships.

We will be looking back at this week's football action and how each North West team shape up going into this weekend.

Like in our debut issue, we will continue to get exclusive interviews for the stories that you might not know of in the world of sport and we hope to take you away from the day-to-day.

We want sport to take over

your life throughout this edition and inspire you to take a leap into a different walk of sports.

We feel the raw passion and emotion of sports fans and as part of that group we will endeavour to deliver that feeling of euphoria.

Whether a stoppage time winner is your thing or it's seeing darts' biggest prospect hitting a nine-darter on the big stage, we'll take you through it all.

Be sure to head over to our website when you have finished reading to find more sports detail and even some trivia.

Thank you for your continued support, we hope you enjoy.

A handwritten signature of Max Peberdy in black ink.

Max Peberdy
Editor

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ROUGHYEDS ROARING FOR CHAMPIONSHIP

PROMOTION AMBITION CLEAR FOR OLDHAM SAYS FORD

YEDS: OLDHAM ARE TAKING AIM AT THE CHAMPIONSHIP

BY HARRY WHITFIELD

It has been 27 years since Oldham Rugby League Football Club (RLFC) were last in the top division of rugby league as the club currently plays in League One.

However, last season the Roughyeds were bought by Oldham-born Mike Ford and local businessmen Mick Harrington and Gary Kershaw, with the aim of taking them back into the top division.

The announcement was also made by the Oldham council that a new £1m pitch was set to be laid at Boundary park for 2024.

This meant that the rugby side could play at the same ground as the football team, Oldham AFC, next season.

Ford, 58, is full of hope for the new campaign after all the changes they have

made to the club since the takeover of Oldham.

He said: "There are facilities there for a League One club and even a Super League club, we think it will be as good as any of the top five rugby league clubs at the moment.

"We decided last year to try and recruit what we thought would be a squad that would be good in the Championship, knowing that we could stay down, which we have done.

"From that point of view, I suppose it's now put a little bit of pressure on us to do really well this year.

"Our expectations are just that, for us to do better than last year."

Ford has seen it all in rugby ever since he started his playing career for Wigan in 1982 as a scrum-half.

He went on to play for his home town Oldham

in 1987 and then again in 2000 as a player-coach making 157 appearances with 37 tries scored.

After retiring from playing in 2001, he switched to rugby union and took on various coaching opportunities until 2023.

Now, as managing director of Oldham RLFC, he takes on a new role in his rugby career.

He said: "It feels different, I really loved playing but I always knew I wanted to be a coach.

"That's where I'm most comfortable is probably in a meeting room or on the training field with a group of players trying to make

them better.

"This is a new role for me and I'm hoping that I can give all my experience on to Sean (Long) and his coaches and support him because it can be a very lonely place, the head coach position.

"I obviously know what it's like and the support or non-support from the board, what you need is to be the best that you can be as a coach."

With the aim to move quickly up the leagues, the club appointed St Helens legend Sean Long as the head coach back in October 2023.

Long's previous and first



**"IT'S GOING TO
BE EXCITING"**
FORD ON THE FUTURE OF
OLDHAM RLFC

head coach role in rugby league was with Featherstone Rovers as he managed to win 19 of his 22 games in charge.

Speaking on how important it is to have someone of Long's reputation managing the club, Ford said: "It's very important. "He's got the stature. He's got what he's done as a player, which is unbelievable. The best thing about Sean is he knows how much he can grow.

"Just because he's head coach of Oldham, he doesn't think it's necessary that he knows everything and he's made it as a coach.

"If you think like that in anything that you do, you probably get bitten along the way. It was important for me, not so much his stature."

Getting the recruitment right has been the main aim for the club as 19 new players have joined the side ahead of the new season.

The likes of Jordan Turner, Jamie Ellis and Craig Kopczak bring in that much needed experience and leadership that is vital in order to move up the leagues.

"Recruitment is everything, you need a mixture of experienced leaders and young inexperienced players with bags of potential," said Ford.

"If you get the environment right and the culture right, they'll be able to grow not just as rugby players, but as people as well.

"I've been away from Rugby League for the last 25 years and learnt a lot about the environments, and playing cultures, and what we need to do to get

the best out of a person, and the best out of a player.

"You always need that mixture of leaders and people who've been there and done that."

Oldham made a great start to pre-season earning a draw against this seasons' newly promoted Super League side London Broncos.

Then in the Challenge Cup they defeated Championship side Barrow Raiders before beating fellow League One side Rochdale Hornets in the 1895 cup. Unfortunately, they exited both cups after defeats to Swinton in the Challenge Cup and York in the 1895 cup.

Cup competitions are not the main focus at the moment right now for the Rugby town as Ford gave his predictions on when they could reach the top again.

He said: "I'm not sure, we could put three years on it. We could put five years on it. We could put ten years on that answer but we don't really want to do that.

"We took the club over when it was ground zero. We were the bottom of all the heritage rugby clubs or if you like the traditional rugby clubs.

"There is going to be lots of twists and turns, back and forth. It's going to be exciting, I guarantee you that. We might never get to the Super League.

"We can't do this without everyone pitching in the best they can. It's not my club, it's our club. In some respects, it's your club, the fans' club.

"We are just the custodians of this great club."



BY JEFFERSON HALL-NOLAN

Barrow Raiders chairman Steve Neal says the timing of the RFL's announcement regarding the structure of the Championship and League One is "disappointing".

Rugby League's governing body, the RFL, announced in November 2023 their intention to confirm the futures of both the second and third tier before the start of the 2024 season.

Fast forward six-months and just two days before the Championship's curtain-raiser, the league confirmed the second tier would be decreasing to a 12-team division in 2026.

To facilitate the move, the bottom two will be relegated in 2024 with the 12th place also having to play out a relegation play-off.

The Raiders finished 11th last term and the club's chair felt let down by the short notice received.

Neal said: "It's a little bit disappointing because this should have been the decision made in the summer.

"Our recruitment process for the '24 season pretty much started in the summer so to only find out officially two days before the start of the season is a disappointment.

"We were hinted at about

TIMING OF RFL RESTRUCTURE "DISAPPOINTING" SAYS BARROW CHAIRMAN

it and had previous meetings, so we kind of knew the direction of travel but we never received any real confirmation.

"I think, as is the way of a rugby league, these things get decided at the last minute.

"With a bit more planning and foresight, it should have come out a little bit so we all had a bit more time to prepare."

With Barrow finishing two places above the drop zone last term, the same result this season would only see the Raiders as the last surviving club – increasing the pressure for the upcoming campaign.

Neal added: "We came 11th last year but this year it'll be a third team also in the mix having to take part in a play-off so it's probably just focused us a little bit more to stay out of the bottom areas.

"Obviously we start the season on Sunday so everyone looks up and we're hoping that we've got a team and a squad to charge for the play-offs so it won't bother us at all but you have to recognise that there is an extra team going down.

"There is that bit of added pressure but hopefully it won't bother us at all and we'll be in the top six rather than the bottom six."



RUGBY LEA



SALFORD RED DEVILS 12-22

WIGAN WARRIORS



WARRIORS: WIGAN RAN OUT WINNERS AT SALFORD ON THURSDAY NIGHT

WARRIORS SINK SALFORD

BY HARRY WHITFIELD

Wigan Warriors beat Salford Red Devils 22-12 after late tries from Jake Wardle and Bevan French snatched victory from the home side.

In an uneventful first half, Warriors opened the scoring just before the break from a Liam Marshall try.

Abbas Miski extended Wigan's lead before tries from Sam Stone and Tim Lafai saw Salford take an unexpected lead of 12-10.

Despite a late Harry

Smith sin-bin, Warriors went on to extend their Super League winning run to 15 games.

The win also means Wigan have beaten every Super League team in the league since July but St Helens who they face next.

Warriors opened the scoring after a kick into the corner by Jai Field bounced before the line for Marshall to take and ground.

In the second half, Wigan extended their lead after French's superb pass found Miski out wide to score in the corner, with the extras converted by Smith.

The Red Devils fought back and Stone got them back into the game in the 51st minute after he grounded Mark Sneyd's kick under the posts.

Sneyd scored the conversion to become Salford's record point scorer in the Super League era, a record held since 2002.

Salford took the lead 63 minutes in when a dropped catch from Miski was caught by Lafai and he scored to put his side level with Sneyd adding the extras for the lead.

With 10 to go, Smith received a sin-bin after

obstructing Ryan Brierley who was trying to collect a kick from Sneyd.

Wigan pushed on and from a Sneyd drop out kick, debutant David Nofaloaluma dropped the catch and Wardle went over uncontested.

In the absence of Smith, Adam Keighran took the conversion and converted it for a 16-12 lead.

With a minute to go, French killed the game off after he sold the defence a dummy to go through a gap and score, with Keighran adding the extras to see the game finish 22-12.

LEAGUE LOOK



CHAMPIONS: SWINTON LIONS WON THE LEAGUE ONE PROMOTION PLAY-OFF FINAL AGAINST DONCASTER IN 2022

NEW RFL FORMAT CONFIRMED

BY JEFFERSON HALL-NOLAN

The Rugby Football League has outlined its plans for a restructured format across the Championship and League One.

The second and third tiers of rugby league will be split into two divisions of

12 teams as opposed to the current format of 14 in the Championship and nine in League One.

The reform doesn't come into full fruition until the 2026 season but there is an immediate impact on the seven North West sides across the two divisions.

The bottom two in the

Championship will be automatically relegated and the League One champions will move the opposite direction with 12th place in tier two taking part in a relegation play-off.

An application process has also opened for a National Conference League side to join the elite game.

In 2025, promotion and relegation will be decided by a "Super Eights" style competition with details still to be finalised.

This will set two equal divisions of 12 teams with the same format providing promotion and relegation outcomes from 2026 onwards.

OVERTIME'S LOWER LEAGUE PREDICTIONS

It's been all Featherstone Rovers in the Championship over the last few years but all reigns come to an end and it's looking like they'll lose out to their nearest rivals.

Wakefield Trinity look on course for this year's title after dropping out of the Super League for the first time in 25 campaigns.

Showed how dominant they can be in the lower leagues with a 110-0 win at Newcastle in February and there's no reason that it's not a sign of things to come.

OVERTIME'S CHAMPIONSHIP PREDICTION: WAKEFIELD TRINITY



There only seems to be one likely winner in League One this season.

A new era dawns for Oldham and with the stewardship of Mike Ford and Sean Long leading the way it's looking like an exciting 2024 for the Roughyeds upon their return to Boundary Park.

Showed what they're capable of in preseason with impressive cup wins against Championship teams Barrow and Halifax as well as drawing to Super League side London.

OVERTIME'S LEAGUE ONE PREDICTION: OLDHAME RLFC





FROM HIGHBURY TO DUBAI

CELEBRATE: THE DUBAI CODS CLAIMED PROMOTION IN THE GULF IN 2022

BY GEORGE PATTEN

Some 3,500 miles away from the Lancashire town, Fleetwood Town's sister club Fleetwood United are flying up the Dubai football pyramid.

Whilst the Cod Army are in danger of falling into League Two, the 'Dubai Cods' sit five points clear at the top of Dubai's third tier with just a handful of games left to play.

How this seemingly unlikely partnership formed, is a wild story of Brexit, loyalty and opportunity. One that Fleetwood United Director of Football, James Ward exclusively told Overtime Magazine.

Ward, 39, a former youth player at Blackburn Rovers, was offered an opportunity to head Fleetwood's international expansion, after stints at Bolton Wanderers

and in Qatar.

"We had an international academy at Fleetwood Town, and we were attracting fantastic international talents into the building at Poolfoot Farm.

"Then Brexit happened. A lot of these really good athletes that we had, unfortunately didn't have British passports, but we wanted to keep them in the building and within the group," said Ward.

Looking to make the most out of the situation, Fleetwood turned towards possible solutions to their new found problem.

"We looked strategically at where we could start to form a group, sort of a mini-Manchester City model if you will.

"The UAE was really attractive, we knew the level of football here was grow-

ing," said the 39-year-old.

The development of football in Dubai, led to a restructuring of their football pyramid, introducing the new UAE Division three pro league.

"We knew that the new league was forming, and we could place up to 30 foreign players at a time here.

"So, we applied for our licence to operate here in the UAE but it was very competitive as there were

over 200 applicants going in for just 16 places in the new league.

"We were fortunate enough to be successful in that, and the success has grown from there," said Ward.

Start to life in Dubai couldn't have gone much better for Fleetwood United who are already seeing things come together on the pitch.

"Sporting success is massive, we want to win games, we want to win leagues.

"We got out of the bottom of the pyramid last year, and we currently sit top of division two, with five games to play which is really exciting.

"We started from a blank piece of paper and a blank canvas, and we're now just a few games away from being in the second tier, it's fantastic," said Ward.

Whilst sporting achievement is of course a priority for Ward and Fleetwood United, they don't underestimate their role in developing players for the wider group.

"We're aware that we're owned by Fleetwood Town and it's very much a sister club and a feeder club.

"We are very much a holding club for these young talented players to nurture them and see



them go further within or outside the group.

“We have an opportunity to attract and find emerging talent around the world and place them in competitive football, where three points matters, and they can develop in a league system,” said Ward.

The 39-year-old has already identified one of the talents that he believes could go all the way.

“We have a young Canadian boy, Keito Lipovscheck, he’s somebody we’ve nurtured and developed since the age of 15.

“We wanted to sign him at our parent club, but unfortunately with the goals for Visas, he’s just outside the parameters.

“He’s had his first sort of ‘rookie season’ with us here. He’s a midfielder, box to box, sort of Gerrard eight, scored 10 goals, and got seven assists, with five left to play.

“He’s one that we really feel could be fantastic for us in the future in the group, or potentially go on to bigger and better things,” said Ward.



TOWN: THE FYLDE COASTERS HAVE PAID THEIR SISTER CLUB A VISIT

Fleetwood’s venture into Dubai is only part of their international expansion. With recent investment into Waterford in Ireland, and Hout Bay in South Africa.

“It’s very clever from the senior management team,” said Ward.

“I don’t think anybody is ever going to match City’s world domination within their group, but at a smaller level, if you can find the right club, at the right time, with the right level of investment, it can certainly be fruitful.

“We’re constantly looking (for new teams to invest in), I think for now stability is key, but who knows, watch this space,” said the 39-year-old.

Whilst the success of

the venture is undeniable, it hasn’t been without its difficulties.

“There have been many challenges, you’ve got to learn how the UAE FA operates.

“Patience on this side of the world is key, you have to respect the culture you’re living within.

“Things can change at the drop of a hat here, you have to respect the religion, and how things work.

“Being as proactive as you can is really important, but being reactive at times is just as important,” said Ward.

Whilst Ward and Fleetwood United are flying, things aren’t going quite so well back at home.

Town are 22nd in League One and are six points

from safety, with their decade long stint in England’s third tier in the balance.

Ward is supportive of the Lancashire side and backs the manager to turn things around.

“Of course, when you’re towards the bottom of any league it’s going to bring negative attention, and you’ll see the odd rumblings on social media.

“There’s not too much we can control from this side of the world, but we’re both there to support one another.

“The gaffer Charlie (Adam) is doing a brilliant job back in the UK, you look at recent results, great win at home, great point against Stevenage.

“If we can get another three points here or there, we’d be putting ourselves in a great position to survive,” said Ward.

Whilst Town welcome Charlton Athletic on Saturday desperately in need of a win, United face off against La Liga HPC in a top of the table clash next Sunday, knowing a win could all but guarantee promotion.

A FAMILIAR FACE



Former Preston North End man, Ben Pringle currently plys his trade out in the Gulf having joined Fleetwood United in the summer of 2023. The Englishman spent plenty of time in the North West and won the League Two play-offs with both Tranmere Rovers and Morecambe. He wears the number 18 shirt for United and occupies a player-coach role.

UAE 2ND DIVISION TABLE

		P	W	D	L	GS	GC	GD	PTS
01	FLEETWOOD UNITED	21	16	02	03	62	21	41	50
02	LALIGA HPC	21	13	07	01	55	19	36	46
03	AL DAHRA	21	14	03	04	39	14	25	45
04	ROYAL FC	21	12	03	06	38	22	16	39
05	BAYNOUNAH	21	10	06	05	35	26	09	36
06	ELITE FALCONS	21	09	05	07	32	20	12	32
07	FURSAN HISPANIA	21	08	03	10	31	28	03	27
08	REGIONAL SPORTS	21	06	08	07	41	34	07	26
09	ALNUJOOM FC	21	06	06	09	30	40	-10	24
10	AL-ITTIFAQ	21	06	05	10	24	42	-18	23
11	AL MOOJ	21	04	04	13	15	47	-32	16
12	UNITED SPORTS	21	04	03	14	21	43	-22	15
13	LAVAL UNITED	21	03	06	12	22	48	-26	15
14	AL HILAL UNITED	21	04	03	14	23	64	-41	15



GREEN PLEDGE “HYPOCRITICAL”

TAKE OFF: MAN CITY'S TEAM PLANE TAKES FLIGHT

BY GEORGE PATTEN

With a big week of European football just gone, it's understandable that Europe's elite will need to fly across the continent to get to games.

Closer to home, it's a lot less understandable. A Premier League study in 2023 showed that 81 out of 100 matches across a two-month period saw teams take short domestic flights to games.

Premier League sides such as Manchester City have claimed to be committed to achieving net

carbon zero by 2030.

Jonathan Atkins, the reserve manager at North West Ecological Trust, has criticised football clubs.

“It is very hypocritical,” said Atkins.

“If they're posing to be supporting environmental works and that sort of thing, then they should be setting an example for the rest of the country.

“They get loads of people following them, looking up to them, they should be setting an example.”

Teams have taken to the skies for flights as short as 27 minutes, with the longest taking just over an hour.

These short haul flights can be unsustainable.

“Short haul flights are worse than long haul flights in many ways,” said Atkins.

“Climate change is happening, it's going to impact millions of people, it's going to have a devastating impact.

“People know it's going to happen, but they aren't bothered about changing their habits and cutting down on flying.”

There are alternatives to flying for Premier League clubs, but they often choose convenience over sustainability.

“They could spend a

little bit more time using a coach, but because they've got so much money they choose to fly,” said Atkins.

“They feel like they can do whatever they want.”

UEFA launched their new ‘Carbon footprint calculator’ recently, in an aim to drive forward sustainability in European football.

The North West Ecological Trust reserve manager welcomed this.

“I think it's very important, it's a step in the right direction,” said Atkins.

“They have to really work on changing lifestyles, using fewer fossil fuels and being more sustainable.”

THE OVERTIME QUIZ OF THE WEEK

1. EVERTON WERE DEDUCTED POINTS WITH IMMEDIATE EFFECT IN NOVEMBER, HOW MANY POINTS WERE THEY DEDUCTED?

2. MANCHESTER CITY BEAT INTER MILAN IN THE CHAMPIONS LEAGUE LAST SEASON, BUT WHO DID THEY LOSE TO THE FIRST TIME THEY REACHED A CHAMPIONS LEAGUE FINAL?

3. LIVERPOOL BEAT AC MILAN IN THE 2005 CHAMPIONS LEAGUE FINAL IN ISTANBUL, BUT WHAT WAS THE SCORE AT THE END OF EXTRA-TIME?

4. BURNLEY GOT PROMOTED AT THE FIRST TIME OF ASKING LAST SEASON, HOW MANY POINTS DID THEY FINISH THE SEASON ON?

5. WHICH NORTH WEST TEAM HAS NEVER BEEN RELEGATED FROM THE TOP DIVISION?

6. WIGAN FAMOUSLY WON THE FA CUP IN 2013, WHICH TEAM DID THEY BEAT IN THE FINAL?

7. WHICH FAMOUS MANCHESTER UNITED PLAYER WENT ON LOAN TO PRESTON NORTH END IN 1995?

8. LIVERPOOL AND EVERTON MET IN THE DERBY AT ANFIELD BACK IN OCTOBER, WHO SCORED LIVERPOOL'S SECOND GOAL?

9. MANCHESTER CITY AND MANCHESTER UNITED MET IN LAST SEASON'S FA CUP FINAL. IN WHAT MINUTE DID ILKAY GUNDOGAN SCORE THE FIRST GOAL?

10. WHAT YEAR DID BLACKBURN ROVERS WIN THE PREMIER LEAGUE?

ANSWERS BELOW

1. 10, 2. Chelsea, 3. 3-3, 4. 101, 5. Everton, 6. Manchester City, 7. David Beckham, 8. Mo Salah, 9. One, 10. 1994/965



EFL: A LOOK AT THE WEEK OF NORTH WEST ACTION

MAX PEBERDY REPORTS

Last weekend Preston North End fell to a 2-1 defeat against Stoke City and will look to bounce back against Plymouth Argyle this weekend. They are in 10th and five points off the play-offs with one game in hand.

Blackburn Rovers were held to a 1-1 draw against Argyle themselves despite an early lead through Championship top scorer Sammie Szmodics.

The draw leaves Rovers

three points off the drop zone and with no wins in seven league games, they will travel to Middlesbrough this Saturday.

Bolton have played twice in the past week with a draw away to Exeter City and a five-nil thumping of Oxford United.

With their convincing performance on Tuesday night against Oxford, they will look to keep up their form against fellow promotion hopefuls in Derby

County with a win taking Wanderers into the top two of League One.

Wigan head into their North-West clash with Blackpool after victory at the weekend but defeat in midweek. A one-nil win at home against Leyton Orient on Saturday was followed by a one-nil loss away at Wycombe Wanderers on Tuesday.

Blackpool head into the clash unbeaten in their last three after a narrow 1-0 win at Northampton in midweek.

A week of mixed emotions for Fleetwood after two draws against Stevenage and Bristol Rovers and it doesn't get any easier

with Charlton Athletic up next on the Fylde coast.

A disappointing week for Morecambe as they failed to get any points from their two games played with defeats against Wrexham and Newport County.

The Shrimps will look to bounce back against Salford on Sunday.

Another mixed week for Accrington Stanley following a loss to Bradford City on Saturday but they bounced right back with a victory against Swindon Town, ending their five game losing streak.

Stanley take on Notts County on Saturday and looking to end the season on a good run of form.

THE OVERTIME TEAM OF THE WEEK

BY JEFFERSON HALL-NOLAN



Here at Overtime, we've put together our Team of the Week of the best performers in the North West in the past week.

Paul Farman is the first Barrow player in the team and stands between the sticks after a clean sheet on Saturday and a wonder save on Tuesday.

Matthew Pennington's man of the match display against Northampton earns the centre half a spot in the squad alongside Manchester City's starman from the weekend, John Stones.

Eoin Toal becomes the first player to earn consecutive spots in the Team of the Week following late heroics at Exeter City.

Bolton teammates

Nathanael Ogbeta and Josh Sheehan also featured after pivotal roles against Oxford in midweek.

There's spots for three North West substitutes this week with Accrington's Alex Henderson, Barrow's Sam Foley and Crewe's Elliott Nevitt all scoring point-winning goals.

It was a tough week for Morecambe with two losses against Welsh opposition but Gwion Edwards' brace in the Shrimps- 5-3 loss at Newport County earns the winger a place in the team.

The final spot in the squad goes to Championship top scorer Sammie Szmodics following his 21st success of the season against Plymouth Argyle on Saturday.

KATIE BROWN: TEAM GB'S WATER POLO TRAILBLAZER

SPLASH: BROWN HAS MADE HER MARK ON THE WATER POLO SCENE

BY GEORGE PATTEN

The sport, often described as 'Rugby in the Water', was at risk of extinction in the UK just ten years ago when all funding was cut.

Ten years on, things have never looked better. GB's Women's Water Polo team have recently competed in both the European and World Championships, achieving results many thought were impossible.

Lancaster's Katie Brown (pictured bottom centre), 29, works as a Sports Science lecturer at the University of Birmingham and has been involved in the sport since the age of eight.

Playing for the GB Women's team and the City of Liverpool Water Polo for over a decade, Brown has been a trailblazer for the sport, and is delighted to see the team back in action.

"It's a joy to be back on the scene again, to be back in the mix and competing at the highest level," she said.

Brown and the rest of the GB team, headed to Eindhoven, Netherlands in January for the European Championships with the ambitious goal of finishing eighth, a result that would see them qualify for the next championship in 2026.

After finishing top of their group, the team just needed to beat Israel to seal the all-important eighth place.

"We beat Israel, that was a really exciting, crowning moment for us all," said the 29-year-old.

"It went down to penalties in that game, so it was really nervy.

After achieving their original goal, Team GB faced off against Croatia with a place at the World Championships up for grabs.

"When we beat Croatia, that was the cherry on top of that entire

experience," said Brown

"Not only had we qualified top eight, but we'd gone one better.

Whilst the groundbreaking results in Eindhoven were well celebrated, they did cause a bit of a logistical nightmare.

"At the airport, on the way home our coach said, 'World's is in two weeks' time so all of you need to go away to your bosses and ask if you can have another three weeks off," said Brown.

"We all left the airport a bit unsure of what's going to happen, because there were quite a few of us with full time jobs.

"I had to go into work Monday morning after being off for two weeks, and ask to go halfway through a university term, where I've got teaching, dissertation students and all kinds of other com-

mitments, to essentially go swanning off to play Water Polo halfway across the world.

"Luckily, my work were amazing with it, they knew it was a once in a lifetime opportunity, they were fantastic".

With permission from work sorted, Brown and the rest of the GB team headed off to Qatar aiming to win a World Championship game for the first time in the nation's history.

Surely to no one's surprise, this groundbreaking GB team did just that.

"We won against South Africa in our group, which was quite an easy game actually, we won quite comfortably.

Just like in Eindhoven, the GB team had a chance to go even further when they played Kazakhstan with 11th place on the line.

"That one got a little bit nervy," said the City of Liverpool star.

"We were winning by quite a few goals, then they came back into it. We were



“THIS IS THE START OF THE PATHWAY TO HAVING THE OLYMPICS IN OUR SIGHTS”

BROWN ON TEAM GB OLYMPIC DREAM

a bit antsy at that point trying to win the game.

“But it was really good to come back with two wins and 11th place”.

Brown and Team GB will be watching from a distance in Paris, as the team didn't qualify for this year's games, but the 29-year-old believes that with more investment there is an Olympic future for the team.

“For us to get into the mix, we're going to need to carry on going to major competitions, and hopefully get some kind of regular funding back into the senior squad,” said Brown.

“At the moment we only have £300,000 over all of our squads, compared to £4 million that the Women's senior team had in 2014.

“2028 might be too soon, to close that big of a gap, but I think this is the start of the pathway to having the Olympics in our sights”.

Whilst Brown may just miss out on her Olympic dream, she's putting in the work much closer to home, to ensure the next generation doesn't.

“Outside of playing, I coach City of Liverpool's Under 17s and Under 19s team,” said the 29-year-old.

“Last year we ran our first summer camp, where we had a four-day event for juniors coming through.

“We had two training sessions a day; we had nu-

trition workshops, strength and conditioning workshops, tactic workshops and lifestyle workshops as well.

“It was really helpful as we had a number of our senior players chip in and give advice and guidance to the younger athletes so they can look up to the senior teams and see them as mentors”.

The City of Liverpool player is determined to make a difference and stay in the sport, however that may be.

“Water Polo has given me so much. I've travelled the world; I've made best friends.

“I got married last year, and four of my five bridesmaids were Water Polo players.

“I can't see myself not giving back, even after I've stopped playing.

“I would love to be able to coach at a GB Level, I'm already involved at the talent centres, in some capacity I'd definitely like to be involved, and I'd love to see us at least make a bid to make it to the Olympics in the future.

Whilst the Lancashire star is prepping the next generation for glory, she still has success of her own to play for as qualification for next year's World Championships is fast approaching.



GB HOPEFULS TO WATCH FOR IN PARIS 2024 WATERSPORTS

BY GEORGE PATTEN

With the Paris 2024 Olympics just around the corner there's plenty of interest in North West watersports.

At overtime we've taken a look at the region's most promising prospects.

Sailor Chris Grube will head to Paris from Cheshire with hopes of finally securing an Olympic medal.

Affectionately known as 'Twiggy', Grube qualified for the mixed pairs event after winning a silver medal at this month's 470 World Championships in Mallorca. He'll hope to add to Great Britain's record tally of 64 medals in Olympic Sailing.

Diver Anthony Harding has had to go through a hellish run of injuries to qualify for the games, alongside synchronised partner Jack Laugher. The pair will compete in the 3 metre competition, and after winning silver at the World Championships they will be hoping to add an Olympic medal to the collection.

Rowing star Harry Brightmore will be hoping to achieve Olympic success in Paris. The 'cox' for

the men's eights, the 29-year-old led his team to back-to-back World Championships in 2022 and 23'. Brightmore will be proudly representing the North-West in Paris, so much so that his dog, fondly named 'Chester' after his hometown, will be willing him on from home.

Birkenhead swimmer Freya Anderson surprised everyone by her performance in the 4X100 metre medley relay at the delayed 2020 Tokyo Olympics where her team won gold. Her performances have been even better since, picking up a number of European and Commonwealth medals in the past few years. Selection for the team is yet to be announced, but if she's on the plane, it's hard to imagine that she won't be claiming another medal.

Fellow swimmer Luke Greenbank won a bronze medal at Tokyo in the 200m backstroke and will be hoping to improve upon that when he lands in Paris. The Crewe man will be looking to make the right headlines with medal success in Paris this summer.



“WORLD CUP OF TENNIS” RETURNS TO MANCHESTER

GLORY: MURRAY GUIDED TEAM GB TO DAVIS CUP TROPHY 2015

BY GEORGE PATTEN

Chosen as one of the four hosts for the group stages, alongside Bologna (Italy), Valencia (Spain) and Zhuhai (China), Manchester will be welcoming back tennis fans from the 10-15th of September.

Manchester played host to one of the all-time great

Davis Cup ties last year, when Dan Evans and Neal Skupski saved four match points on route to victory over France.

Great Britain then advanced to the Quarter Finals where they came up short against Novak Djokovic’s Serbia.

Team GB are 12th in the Davis Cup Rankings, and will face stiff opposition

from the likes of the USA, Germany and defending champions Italy.

This year’s Davis Cup could be the last chance for British fans to see legend Andy Murray play in the UK.

With rumours of his retirement ramping up, 2024 could well be the final year of the Scotsman’s career, and the Davis Cup

group stage will be the final tournament taking place in the country this year.

However, fans will have to wait and see if GB Davis Cup captain Leon Willis will select Murray to be a part of the squad, with the Scot now rank 61 on the ATP tour.

Murray and Cameron Norrie will find out their group fate on Tuesday.

ENGLAND SPOT NOT A GIVEN FOR 700 WICKET ANDERSON



SEVEN CENTURIES: ANDERSON CLAIMED WICKET 700 IN INDIA

BY MAX MCCARTHY

England legend James Anderson says his place in the team “is not a given” ahead of this summer’s test series.

The seamer reached a landmark milestone when he became the first fast paced bowler to reach 700 test wickets.

The Lancashire County

cricketer claimed his 700th wicket in England’s defeat in Dharamsala, as India sealed a 4-1 test victory.

England, who completed a historic comeback in the first test, failed to capitalise on a fantastic start to the series, losing the next four tests convincingly.

Anderson, who had a disappointing summer, bounced back well during

the tour of India.

The fast bowler took 10 wickets in four tests at an average of 33.5 in increasingly difficult conditions.

The Burnley born bowler said: “I’m definitely in the best shape I’ve ever been in.

“I like where my game is at and I still have the enjoyment of turning up every day and trying to get better in the nets.

“My place in the team is not a given so I have to keep working hard to prove I’m worth a place in the summer.”

England will start a three match series against the West Indies in July, before another three match Test series against Sri Lanka in August as Brendon McCullum’s side look for success.

NINE DART DELIGHT FOR LITTLER ON EURO TOUR DEBUT

DARTS



HUMPHRIES AT THE DOUBLE

BY JAMES SADLER

Crew's Luke Humphries has gone top of the Premier League table after securing back-to-back nightly wins in the Premier League. The world number one beat Stockport's Nathan Aspinall 6-3 in the final in Nottingham.

Humphries has moved two points clear of Michael van Gerwen at the top after picking up all five points on night seven.

The 29-year-old hit 12 180s across the evening and averaged 102 over three matches.

The four-time major winner got the better of Michael Smith and Peter Wright to get to the final. Elsewhere on the night, Warrington's Luke Littler produced arguably the best performance of his career as he blew away seven-time winner van Gerwen 6-2 in the quarter finals before losing out to Aspinall.

Peter Wright picked up his first points of the campaign after defeating Gerwyn Price. The roadshow rolls on to Dublin next Thursday.

WINNER: TEENAGE SENSATION LITTLER PICKED UP EUROPEAN TOUR SUCCESSION ON DEBUT

BY JAMES SADLER

Luke Littler hit perfection in Belgium as he beat Rob Cross to the crown on his PDC European Tour debut with a nine-dart finish.

The 17-year-old averaged 103.76 and hit six 180s on his way to winning a last-leg decider to beat former world champion Cross 8-7 in Wieze.

Littler's heroics came in the 11th leg of the final after he piled in two treble 20's and a treble 19 to kickstart.

A barrage of five consecutive darts in 60 gave the Nuke a shot at double 12 and he made no mistake, wheeling away in celebration for his third perfect leg in the PDC.

"I'm really happy to hit a nine-darter, I prefer 144 to 141 to finish a nine because when the first treble 20 goes in I'm confident of following it with another,"

said the Warrington local.

"I know the spotlight is on me because I've done so well but I just play my darts and get on with it. I just do what I do."

To get to the final, the St Helens darts academy graduate came through a controversial semi-final with Germany's Ricardo Pietreczko.

Littler averaged 104.25 in a comfortable 7-3 win but words were exchanged between the pair on stage after the game, with the 17-year-old gesturing to the crowd about the actions of the world number 34.

This led to Pikachu to brand the world championship finalist as arrogant on social media, where Littler responded by saying he was aware of the target on his back.

Elsewhere, Stephen

Bunting put in another impressive display as he reached the last 16.

The newly crowned Masters winner had a tournament average of 100.65 before he fell to 2021 world champion Gerwyn Price 6-4.

Across the North West, out of our seeded players, world number one Luke Humphries was the only man to win a game at the event.

Cool Hand obliterated veteran James Wade with a 6-1 victory but fell at the next stage, losing 6-3 to Ryan Searle.

The European Tour's number one seed, Morecambe's Dave Chisnall lost in his first game with a lacklustre average of 89.4 in a last leg loss to Ryan Joyce, while Michael Smith underwhelmed in a 6-2 defeat to Mike De Decker.

Littler is now into a provisional place for the World Matchplay.



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