



WOMEN'S FOOTBALL AND CLIMATE CHANGE

THE PLAYERS' PERSPECTIVE

MAY 2024

My name is Amy James-Turner, I play centre half for Tottenham Hotspur Women in The WSL. I also recently founded Two Sides Grind, a mobile coffee campervan, with my wife, Welsh International Angharad James.

It was during the COVID19 epidemic that I started to learn more about the devastating effects of climate change. That time in my life really put things into perspective and I started to reflect on my own lifestyle and impact. I decided it was time to change.

I've been on my own journey with the climate and it's been tough, the more you understand, the darker it seems to get. There's been many lonely times along the way too. Times that made me think: Am I really alone in this, or do other people feel the same, just we don't talk about it?



It was this question that formed the heart of the report. I wanted to know how my teammates and friends in the professional game felt about climate change. What are we doing about it? How they see the efforts of their clubs, the football industry ... and what more could be done.

With the help of the guys at Planet League, I started with a series of interviews with ten players and managers currently active in leading clubs in England, Scotland and Wales. The conversations were for 30 to 40 minutes on topics like their attitudes to environmental issues, how active they are personally on these issues, whether they talk about it among family and friends. We looked at what their clubs are doing and what more they would like to see done in football.

We also ran a survey of women professional players. We got 113 responses during January 2024 all from women professionals from 36 different clubs.

What did we find out?

Women footballers are really concerned about climate change. They really believe in the power football has to lead on climate action, but they are disappointed at what the industry has done so far. While they are realistic - recognising that it's not easy to change, they would like to see more effort and leadership from clubs. And they'd like the clubs to help the players themselves learn more about environmental issues and what role they can play in tackling them.

I guess that's what I suspected. But now we have qualitative and quantitative evidence to back this drawn from professional players across the country. And we've opened up the conversation. Now it's so clear how many people really care, hopefully that's going to make it easier in the future to talk about it, to push for more leadership from the football industry and to work out what we can do together to make change.

One thing about anonymity. We have not said who the players were whom we interviewed or who took part in the survey. We have respected their anonymity, and agreed to do that for a number of fairly obvious reasons.

If you want to talk more about this and future plans, drop me a message or come join me for a coffee at Two Sides!

Thanks for reading this.

Amy

SUMMARY

1. PLAYERS ARE CONCERNED

Players feel the impact of climate change today on their game. They are deeply concerned about what the future holds, and worried that we aren't responding seriously.

2. FOOTBALL HAS AN OBLIGATION TO STEP UP

Football has great influence, perhaps more than any other cultural force on the planet and as such, not least because it engages so many young people, it has an obligation to use that influence for good.

3. PLAYERS HAVE A BIG ROLE TO PLAY

Similarly, players are influential and credible. They have a role to set an example and show leadership to their fans. However, it's not easy at all, and players feel they need help in this.

4. THERE IS MUCH WORK TO BE DONE

So far football has not been able to fulfil its potential as a force for positive change. There's a lot to do - not just among clubs and leagues, but for a range of stakeholders in the football industry.



This is a call for action coming from within the game, not from outsiders.

Lots of people and organisations from outside football have already called on football and footballers to do more about climate change. But the top female players in the professional game who have contributed to this report are not just "lots of people". They are insiders, and the very people who make the game happen, by whose dedication the game can flourish. They are the young people who will be heavily affected by climate change throughout their lives.

This report shows the power of conversation. It came about through conversation and asking questions. Through that we got to learn about each other, share our feelings and find common ground.

THEME 1: Players are concerned

Players are worried that climate change is affecting the football industry today

Climate change is affecting football today. It is no longer something remote, but something which is affecting lives and the game now.

Climate change is affecting football on the pitch and in the broader football industry

11%

STRONGLY AGREE

54%

AGREE

32%

NEUTRAL

2%

DISAGREE

1%

STRONGLY DISAGREE

65% agree or strongly agree that climate change is affecting football on the pitch and in the broader football industry, while only 3% disagree or strongly disagree.

This brings a range of concerns and anxieties which came out strongly in the interviews.

These ranged from worries about climate change today ...

"I am worried that it's October and it's still 25 degrees ..."

... to worries for the future:

"In the future it only seems to be getting worse."

"I'm very concerned. As I've got older I've realised a lot more that what we do as individuals, as families and as businesses has such a huge impact on the future."

"It's all very well living in the now and we're okay at the minute but what kind of world is there for my kids to grow up in and for their kids to grow up in?"

"In such a short period of time, how much change can happen - within a few months, few years. It's scary the way we're going, what the world could look like in a few years."

A common theme connected to this is that people aren't taking climate change seriously:

"The more information you get, the more worried you become. It's also sad to realise that so many people around the world don't understand it."

"We've become quite privileged as a generation. We think we can just jump into cars and get to wherever we want to go; or taking a flight is the easiest thing in the world for us. So it's kind of second nature and we don't even think about those kinds of things."

“When you look at it, the planet’s only going in one direction at the moment, and I think there’s a lot of lack of awareness probably with the majority of the population.”

“The biggest issue I believe is people don’t know how much our day-to-day decisions affect our planet.”

“The pointlessness of how people act. You’re just killing the planet and there’s no reason for it.”

“I don’t think people give it a second thought, to be brutally honest.”

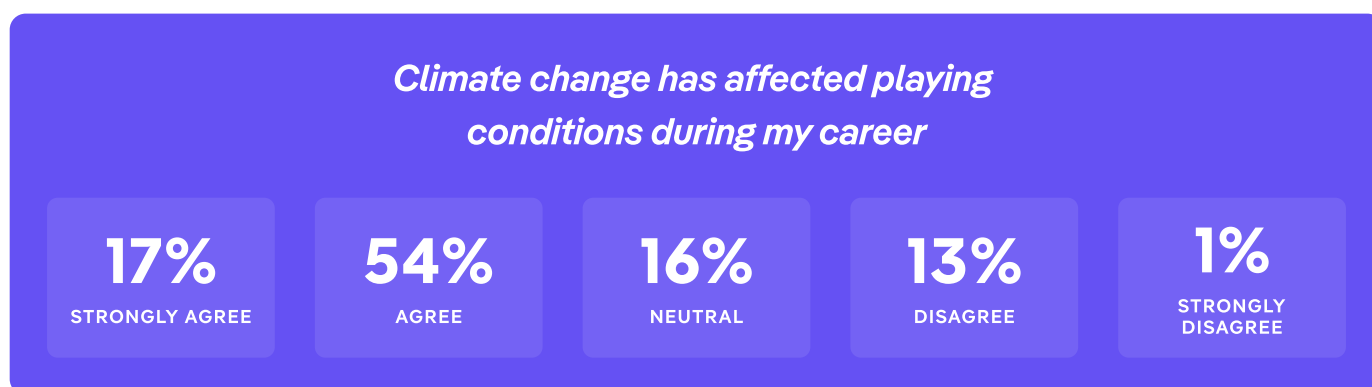
“A lot of people hear about it and get annoyed by the topic because they think it’s something that they can’t affect. Whereas I feel more people can do more than what they think.”

“This is something that impacts everybody. Whereas some political things that happen in the world right now don’t impact everyone. I don’t feel like we understand what things could look like if we carry on behaving with the same habits that we are in now. And the impact that will have in the future.”

Perhaps the saddest reflection on the implications of climate change is this:

“... the thought of me having a baby for example. There’s no way. Why I would want to bring ... why would you want to bring a kid into the world ... ?”

Climate change is already impairing playing conditions



Over 70% believe playing conditions are already affected by climate change. This isn’t something far away in the future. It’s now. It’s flooded pitches, wildfires and tropical downpours.

Witnessing forest fires burning while they played brought it home to one interviewee:

“Literally you could barely see, it was so smoky and foggy yet they still played the games. They just had a break every 15 minutes. All that air pollution and they had oxygen tanks on the side of the pitch. After 15 minutes, 30 minutes, half time, 60 minutes, 75 minutes, they had these mini breaks. It was quite hard to breathe and especially for people with asthma and other health issues.”

Closer to home:

“On the back end of COVID. It was unbelievably hot. And we had to either cancel games or have multiple water breaks, because we couldn’t do training. But the main thing is our waterlogged pitches ... because we’re in England.”

And consequential impacts:

“When the pitch is waterlogged, we have to travel further (to another ground). So that’s a knock-on effect.”



DISCUSSION

WHERE DOES YOUR CONCERN ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT COME FROM?

Spending time outdoors and in nature

"We did spend a lot of time outdoors. Mostly because we were into sport all of us as a family like my mum. Me and my brother were obviously mad keen on football. So we were always outside."

"Because I grew up in a small scenic village."

"We probably spent the majority of our childhoods outside. My family are very active and we did things as a family, all of us, even if it was just going for walks and things like that."

Family influence - especially mums

"My childhood was like that. If I dropped some litter, my mum slapped my backside!"

"Growing up my mum was always really good at recycling and always trying to be as environmentally aware as she could be."

"My mum has always been like: 'Don't waste food. We don't need excess stuff because there's people that can't have it or can't afford it.'"

"My mum is very much on the right side. 'Get what you need and only what you need.' Whereas my dad's the kind of person that ... You'd say to him. 'Oh, we need some orange juice for the house,' and he comes back with 12 cartons of orange juice and I'm like, 'What is the need?'"

"If you haven't got family around you who are into the environment and into sustainability and climate change then you don't learn these things until later."

Influences later in life

"It's more speaking with people who are very knowledgeable on the subject that has helped me grow, giving me more of an understanding the issues surrounding the topics and how each individual can make better decisions and better choices to help the environment."

"It wasn't really drilled into me as a kid. It was probably more university where I actually came to understand the facts behind it [climate change] and the effect of it."



DISCUSSION

THE SYSTEM OR THE INDIVIDUAL?

Where is change going to come from? Is it down to changing the system or does the individual have responsibility, too?

“Both. Because if the system's not right, then it's up to the people to working within the system to challenge: check and challenge in the right way to try and influence change. Clubs have responsibility to do their bit and put process in place to help change things ... and actually educate people.”

“It's a systems change issue: If it's not set up that way, if you don't have protein options within the club, you're kind of forced to eat meat or you're forced to use plastic cups or paper cups.”

“Systems change issue: But with education ... you're a little more mindful and conscious of your individual decisions.”

“System v individual: I think it's both. I think it's everyone. Why should we blame some part and say that it's not our responsibility. Why not everyone?”

“The bigger change has to come from those who are in power like governments and larger businesses and people who are actually having major impacts on the environment rather than solely as individuals.”

THEME 2: Football's obligation to step up

Despite the grim situation, there's a really strong sense that football needs to step up.

Football can be an effective lever in the fight against climate change

How effective do you think the football community working together can be in the fight against climate change?

35%

EXTREMELY EFFECTIVE

50%

EFFECTIVE

7%

NEUTRAL

8%

NOT VERY EFFECTIVE

0%

NOT EFFECTIVE AT ALL

85% of players think that the football community can be effective in having an impact in the fight against climate change.

Football should actively reduce its carbon footprint

the football industry should actively reduce its carbon footprint and contribute to a more sustainable future?

57%

STRONGLY AGREE

38%

AGREE

4%

NEUTRAL

1%

DISAGREE

0%

STRONGLY DISAGREE

A higher percentage - **over 96%** - believe that the football industry needs to be actively working to reduce its carbon footprint.

In principle, at least, footballers see that the potential is there.

Not only is the potential there, but players feel there is a responsibility for the game to act:

"Football clubs need to lead from the front in terms of setting examples and utilising the resources they have to begin to make real changes. I feel this can be improved in the leagues and clubs that I have played in."

“The professional football industry is extremely rich, so I think the industry has no excuses not to become sustainable very, very soon. We or the industry has a responsibility to help fund the broader society’s green transition. For example by making a foundation where organisations working with development and football can apply for money for sustainable actions.”

At the moment the game is a long way from achieving this potential or fulfilling the responsibilities some players feel it has. With some exceptions, the clubs are not approaching this systematically or consistently.

This brings a range of concerns and anxieties which came out strongly in the interviews.



DISCUSSION

FOSSIL FUEL SPONSORSHIP DIVIDED OPINION

*What do you feel about fossil fuel
sponsorship in football?*

5%

ANY MONEY IS GOOD

48%

ACCEPT MONEY BUT
WORK WITH THEM TO
BECOME GREENER

32%

PHASE IT OUT OVER THE
NEXT FIVE YEARS

15%

STOP IT NOW

It's nicely balanced. 53% are ok to accept fossil fuel money. 15% want an immediate stop to it. And the remainder, 32% would phase it out over five years.

The realist position was expressed by one of the players:

“It would be great to not have to accept money from companies who aren’t so-called “sustainable”. However, I don’t believe all women’s football is in a strong enough place economically to push away money from companies who wish to invest. A team with a low budget trying to compete in a top flight league will no doubt take money from a company who wishes to invest even if it’s a company who may be hurting the environment such as BP or Shell.”



DISCUSSION

FLYING TO GAMES ISN'T SEEN AS A MAJOR ISSUE

What should be done about teams flying to domestic games?

13%

WE SHOULD BAN IT

30%

PHASE IT OUT OVER FIVE YEARS

55%

ALLOW IT BUT ONLY OVER A CERTAIN DISTANCE

4%

IT'S NOT AN ISSUE

Again, a fairly balanced view. 55% are ok about flying to games if it is over a certain distance (not defined). A small minority don't consider it an issue. And 43% would ban it - some of those (13%) right away, and the remainder over five years.

Views range from pragmatic:

"It's hard to say about flights. It depends on the league. English football I understand. But in other leagues the distances are too far to not fly and would affect recovery of players having longer journeys."

to emphatic:

"Teams flying for domestic games is baffling and should be stopped."

But there are solutions if you're serious about it:

"If you play for Southampton and you're playing Newcastle, it's very difficult to ask players to travel on a coach. But if you give it two days and have access to a training pitch the day before the game...There are ways around it. I would say limit the amount of travel that everyone does."

THEME 3: Players have a big role to play

Climate change is affecting football today. It is no longer something remote, but something which is affecting lives and the game now.

Professional footballers can use their influence in tackling climate change

Professional footballers can have a big influence in raising awareness about climate change and promoting sustainable living

46%

STRONGLY AGREE

50%

AGREE

4%

NEUTRAL

0%

DISAGREE

0%

STRONGLY DISAGREE

Overwhelmingly women players are very conscious of their influence and responsibility for showing leadership on climate, with **96% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they can use their influence for tackling climate change.**

Professional footballers should lead by example

Professional footballers should lead by example in adopting sustainable lifestyles both on and off the pitch

22%

STRONGLY AGREE

63%

AGREE

13%

NEUTRAL

2%

DISAGREE

0%

STRONGLY DISAGREE

85% agree or strongly agree, whereas 13% are neutral and 2% actually disagree.

The view is tempered by realism about how the demands of being a professional football player make sustainable lifestyles difficult in practice:

"I think it is hard for players to have a huge impact. Yes we can do things at an individual level (e.g. transport to and from training, eating, products we buy etc.) but the nature of the game involves a lot of travel and a lot of travel by plane."

"If you want to play at the top of the game, then your carbon footprint is going to be high regardless."

“When you're in the football bubble and your focus is just on being an elite athlete, then [climate change] is not really a concern. You're just happy to be doing what you love... you're not really thinking about that [climate impact]. But I think sometimes when you take a step back and you actually look at things and the impact that it's having, then there's probably ways that football in general could be a lot greener.”

And that creates conflict for some players:

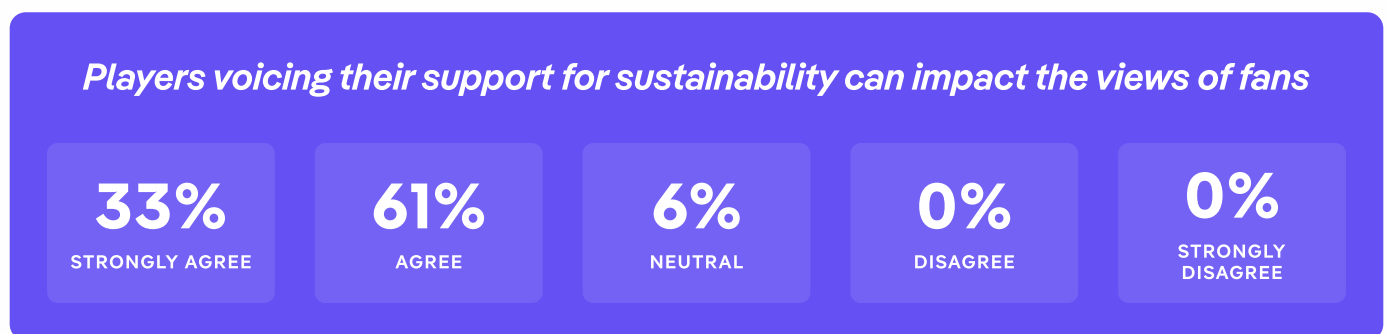
‘I don't like how much stuff we have to do for football that's not great for the world.’

‘At [my previous club] I felt like I was constantly fighting battles off the pitch to try and make changes. You know, we had plastic water bottles and single-use plastic cutlery ... and stuff that we don't do here at all. And it was really stressing me out. It'd be nice to sign for a club where these initiatives are already in place where they're taking it seriously and you know, and I don't have to fight these battles.’

Not everyone responds positively when you speak out, and you have to take it on the chin:

‘Some people are really like, “oh, I've never thought of it that way.” That's great. I've never seen it like that before. I'm actually gonna get a water bottle. And then others just kind of laugh and then I'm just like, “Yeah cool.”’

Players feel they can influence the views of fans



There is also clear agreement that if player's speak out they can impact the views of fans - 94% agreeing to that.

There is a strong sense, moreover, that footballers should be speaking out:

“We need to get high-profile players to stand up from the Premier League as well as the female game ... to actually be accountable and say this is what I believe in because the thing is important. People will follow it. Trendsetters. People follow trends.”

“If the system's not right, then it's up to the people to working within the system to challenge in the right way to try and influence change.”

“As footballers we need to use our platform. We can work with leaders of the country to try and initiate changes.”

“I think it's a crucial issue and we should speak more about concrete initiatives with our clubs and the federation.”

“One thing I've learned is that if I see something that's not right, I will say and I will speak up.”

“When you think about the players and the platform that they have and the presence that they have, you can influence fans and the wider community.”

“I do make comments about stuff all the time.”

“I think as players we're very influential. Certain people in our team have a crazy amount of followers on social media so that they can actually use that for the power of good instead of ... just getting freebies. And I don't think we use it.”

“I think the biggest thing right now that can happen is people having conversations and talking about the impacts that have happened on the environment and things that can change.”

Speaking out is difficult

But speaking out isn't all that easy, especially when you are alone:

“I found it difficult to talk about things in the media about climate change and about sustainability, because I'm in football and haven't felt like I'm in the right place to talk about it and I feel a bit of a hypocrite.”

“I've struggled in the past speaking to teammates about this kind of issue because they don't seem up to date with current political issues. You know what it's like, we live in this very sheltered lifestyle, don't we?”

“I feel a lot of people - especially younger people - would be like, I don't want to get involved in that because I don't look weird.”

“There's a feeling that it won't make any difference. So why bother? I think that's probably what I'd imagine is the biggest barrier. It's all very well me doing it. But what difference is one person going to make when there's billions of others not doing it? And then probably ... is anyone gonna take me seriously? I'm gonna get laughed at? Will people think I'm just being a geek or whatever?”

“It's difficult. In my team up here, I'm known as being weird because I'm very conscious of it.”

“I didn't want to start my first first day or first week by saying “Okay, you do this wrong.” I've been trying to ask other players what do you think about ... plastic bottles, for example. I have no idea if anyone else thinks the same or it's just me. But it's been nice to see that some players also think so. Then it's actually like, yeah, we should maybe raise our voice and if more and more players question certain things, maybe we'll change things and spread the word.”

Players want help from clubs

Football clubs should provide training to employees and players about climate change and environment issues

24%

STRONGLY AGREE

58%

AGREE

16%

NEUTRAL

2%

DISAGREE

0%

STRONGLY DISAGREE

82% of players agree or strongly agree that clubs should provide training to employees and players about climate change and environment issues.

Players often feel uncomfortable that they don't know enough about sustainability:

"I find it embarrassing that I don't know much more about it other than little bits - it's such an important issue and I know very little about it. I think a lot of people will come across quite embarrassed; because that's how I feel."

"People [players] don't talk about it at all. But I'd like to think that the reason why people don't talk about it is because they haven't been educated and it's not that they don't care about it."

"I can hold up my hands - I got asked to do an interview about sustainability. And I turned it down because I didn't know much about it. I didn't want to speak about the topic and not do the topic justice."

To get more confidence, many feel they need some training on climate and sustainability:

"I believe we need to be educated more on the subject as I don't know a lot about it."

"More should be done to help facilitate players trying to make a change."

"Organise training to raise awareness of environmental protection, and list practical actions each of us can take to protect the environment."

And the clubs need to be clear to the players what they are doing already:

"I think the club can make us more aware of some of the things that they're doing to help the environment because I don't think everyone is aware of it."

"We should have it in the diary once a year for educating us - why not educate the people that are involved in a world leading club?"



“The clubs have responsibility to do their bit. But not just do their bit to help change things for the better but actually educate people.”

The younger generation seem to need as much guidance as the older one:

“But even the younger ones ... we have to keep reminding them to pick up their own litter, when they're taken tape off their ankles and not leave it on the pitch. We have to set standards and influence them to look after their stuff.”

That means properly engaging them:

“We've seen that in the football environment, that if you just scream, scream, scream, scream, your voice becomes numb and no one listens. Whereas if you involve them ... the younger kids will get involved.”

And some practical pointers to how any education should be delivered:

“People would probably be more receptive if it was before training, rather than after.”

“I'd love little take-homes every session rather than one big session ...”

“I personally react better to something that's interactive... I would like to be given the facts so I can actually understand it, and then make it into something interactive, which makes everyone join in. Otherwise it's very easy just to sit there and nod your head.”



THEME 4: There is much work to be done

Players don't think their clubs are doing enough

How do you rate the steps taken by your club or league to address environmental concerns?

3%

STRONGLY POSITIVE

16%

POSITIVE

35%

NEUTRAL

36%

NEGATIVE

10%

STRONGLY NEGATIVE

Overall, the opinion of efforts taken by clubs and leagues so far is poor. Only 19% are positive, while 46% are negative.

Environmental initiatives football are not inspiring enough

how much do you rate initiatives or projects in football related to environmental sustainability

5%

EXTREMELY INSPIRING

26%

QUITE INSPIRING

37%

NEUTRAL / DON'T KNOW

25%

NOT VERY INSPIRING

7%

NOT AT ALL INSPIRING

Not only are clubs not doing enough. What they are doing, is not yet up to scratch. Despite a high percentage of respondents seeing potential in football's role, 32% of players are uninspired and 37% don't have an opinion on the quality of existing initiatives. 31% feel inspired by what clubs are doing. The large portion who don't have an opinion on this suggests that the industry has not been effective at making its efforts well known to the public or to players.

This was clearly articulated by several respondents.

"When asked, I couldn't really think of any climate change initiatives within football clubs, so maybe it's a sign that this needs a bigger push."

"I don't think I've been a part of any team or organisation that has stressed the importance of sustainability or spoken about climate change or anything that we can do individually to make small changes or what we could do collectively, [or] raise awareness for other people."

"A lot of clubs say that they want to be better and they want to be greener and stuff like that. But there's not a lot that's been done."

Or most simply, when asked if they can think of any really good green initiatives, the most common answer is: "I don't know."

On Green Football Weekend, for example:

"I'd say on the whole I was probably more disappointed ... because I think it could have had a really big effect. And we have the profiles as football clubs, as individuals, to help promote it. But I believe there were only a few clubs who actually proceeded with it."

Indeed some were fairly pessimistic about the industry:

"I don't feel like clubs will ever put environmental sustainability at the top of their priority list, maybe a token gesture. It will take something huge for the bosses of clubs to make the changes we would like to see. I believe a lot has to do with the lack of knowledge about not only the negative impact we can have promoting sustainability but also the effect our current lifestyle has on the planet. We definitely need more education on these matters."

The football industry isn't yet good at encouraging fans to adopt more eco-friendly behaviours

The football industry is good at encouraging fans to adopt more eco-friendly behaviours and to reduce their their environmental impact

4%

STRONGLY AGREE

9%

AGREE

22%

NEUTRAL

54%

DISAGREE

11%

STRONGLY DISAGREE

Engaging fans on climate action is arguably the most impactful thing clubs can do - having more potential impact than in-house emission reduction efforts.

Yet, despite the potential, almost two thirds of respondents (65%) disagree with the claim that football is good at encouraging fans to live greener and a further 22% don't have an opinion.

But life in football is intense, and you have to be single-minded to win trophies. Players are realistic about the obstacles to change, and are aware of the constraints facing clubs, and the priorities:

"In the grand scheme of things when you're trying to buy a striker and you're trying get to the board to get the striker over. And you're asking: can we change the plastic bottles? Yeah. And ... will the plastic bottles keep me in a job? So you've got to pick your battles."

"You need to keep your players hydrated. You're giving them the water bottle and you're not really thinking about what it's in."

"With the pressures of the job you can just get consumed and forget about yourself. Forget about the things that really matter in the world, family friends, protecting the environment, all those things."

"In our industry because it's so fast paced and demanding that maybe we just don't even look outside of our bubble ... Have I really looked outside? Probably not enough."

"I am a big believer in needing change and climate action in both society and football but am also aware that it will not be achievable overnight."

It seems that at the crux of the matter is a lack of leadership from the top:

"Maybe they don't have the right people in the right places. I feel if the people at the top care then they enforce that and that has to filter the whole way through the club. And I think that's what's missing at other clubs - that the people at the top don't have such an opinion on the environment ... because all clubs have the facilities. They have the money and the resources to be able to do it. But they don't do it. Because they don't have enough people who care."

DISCUSSION

THE ONE SIMPLE THING FOOTBALL SHOULD DO

Players were asked what they consider the biggest issues - and if there was one thing a club should do, what would it be. The most popular answer: plastic.

"Plastic bottles should be banned from training ground"

"Top thing for clubs: Trying to move away from that convenience thing; the amount of things now that are provided to players ... the supplements, the protein they're everything they get, but it is often packaged individually for them a place to grab and go."

"Travel is hard but single-use plastic is the thing all clubs should be able to pro-actively move away from. That's easy."

"Clubs still use plastic bottles at training; no recycling is available."

"I'm constantly recycling things and making sure that I'm trying to buy things without plastic."

Travel also came up:

"What if we cut down on the amount of international breaks, and make our football calendar shorter and more feasible for players. And regulate how many flights are made a year, per player..."

But perhaps the most reflective answer was this one:

"Move away from the stereotype of what football is and how people behave within it."

IMPLICATIONS

Climate change and environmental problems are complex. No single organisation and no single approach can address them. They need people and organisations at all levels to take responsibility and take action.

Football has great potential as a force for positive change because of its extraordinary reach and influence. And the majority of footballers are young people - the very people alive today who will be most affected by climate change.

We picked out these implications from the interviews and surveys:

Players really care, but they need support turning the care into action

Many players feel they need to know more about environmental issues. This is partly so that they can feel comfortable talking about the issues with teammates or fans. Players are looking to clubs for support in this. Three quarters of players would like help from the club in learning about environmental issues and how to talk about them. Speaking out is difficult, especially when you feel you're alone. Knowledge on the topic gives that confidence you need to take a stand.

It should be possible to get organised at club or league level to have regular sessions to learn about climate and environmental issues. Already some such initiatives have started, but leadership from club and league management would help to scale these up quickly.

The football industry has great potential to drive climate action but it is underperforming today

Players believe clubs have the responsibility to change and the potential to have positive impact, but the game needs to improve its performance. There are implications for each of the many stakeholders in the game:

Clubs: They need to adopt a structured approach to tackling climate change. Ad hoc efforts are not enough now. This should incorporate both in-house measures but also using football's voice to engage fans and their communities. This will need leadership from the top, proper organisation structures and resources put behind it. This is only what other industries have been doing for some time.

Leagues: Leagues - and their executives - can be bolder. Some of the initiatives to make the game more sustainable (e.g. solving transportation issues) need coordination at league or industry level. For this to work, the drive has to come from the top.

The players represent a younger generation who will be most affected by climate change and who are most aware. The football administration can learn something by listening to their concerns.

The men's game: This report has originated in the women's game. Several male footballers have spoken out about climate, individually. We expect that there are more out there who are concerned and it would be good to hear them. Some high-profile players have bravely spoken out on other social issues, such as racism, mental health, school meals or gambling. And through doing that they've made a difference. Perhaps environmental issues are more complex and it's also so hard to avoid accusations of hypocrisy. But it would be great to see more involvement from the men's game.

Sponsors: Companies which are serious about climate action and not just interested in greenwashing have potential for meaningful commercial sustainability partnerships in the women's game where clearly a large proportion of the players would like to see more happening.

For those sponsors that are genuine about climate action, they can support and give a platform to players who want to speak out.

Broadcasters: Both Sky and TNT Sports are notably pro-active on climate issues. Perhaps where they can add to their impact is to give support to players who want to talk publicly about climate action.

Broadcasters also have an important role to play in tackling the issue of flying to matches, because of the timing of games. They could help by opening up and having a frank conversation about the connection between scheduling and flying. Work together with the other stakeholders to address it in a structured way.

Fans: There's an open door in women's football. Fans can take up their invitation to engage on climate action and build momentum to push the game for more action. Fans can make a difference by reaching out to players who are looking for change and giving them their support.

Players' associations: Associations can provide training courses and a forum for players who are interested to learn about climate and environmental issues.

They can also help ensure that the voices of concerned players are heard by the game's administrative bodies and leaders.

At all levels of the game, conversations and initiatives connecting other like-minded people will build a critical mass of concern and that will give decision-makers licence for action.

More conversations would build a sense of common purpose

It often happens when you start talking to people about climate change, you discover that other people are more concerned and interested than you originally thought. Talking about it, you find allies, and with teamwork people are more effective and influential. So, even if it's awkward or embarrassing or even a bit boring, making climate change a topic of conversation can build new relationships and understanding.

We couldn't cover everything in this report - there's only so much bandwidth. So we need more conversations to cover lots more topics and dig into them in the future - the men's game, the leadership of football, fan transport, diet and nutrition, even how big should football be ... There are lots of questions affecting us and the planet.



AMY'S REFLECTION FROM HER INTERVIEWS

A lot of the players I've spoken to hadn't really thought much about climate change before. As footballers it is drilled into us; all that matters is the next game, don't think too far ahead, focus on the here and now. And naturally we've become creatures of habit, stuck in our ways with the same routine because we know that consistency drives success. I sympathise with players, we have a lot going on and we sacrifice a lot to be at the level we're at. The pressures of the professional game doesn't leave much room to consider the world outside us. But what if climate conversations became part of the dressing room. What if we, as a collective, started to be more present and make more conscious decisions and be more open and honest with ourselves and each other about this.

Cue the interviews. Something happened. Our conversations led to further conversations over meal times at the club, we spoke to our family members, we started asking questions and looking at our own lifestyle choices. Some players even felt empowered to start actioning change, not only in their own lives but within their clubs too.

The interviews triggered something important. They showed that by talking about this space and being present, we open the door to possibility. It showed that lots of people do care and are concerned, even if we don't always show it. And maybe we all need a bit of guidance and support as we navigate the challenges that lie ahead.

It gave me confidence that people do want change and do want to be part of making change for the good. It made me and my fellow professional footballers more confident to speak out, and I hope lots more people will join us.

There are so many amazing role models in women's football, players who have done so much for the game and who will always continue to demand more. I really believe that women's football can be the leaders of change in taking climate action. I will continue to push the needle, however difficult and daunting that might be at times, in the hope that I inspire others to do the same.



About the authors

Amy James-Turner is an English professional footballer who plays as a defender for Women's Super League club Tottenham Hotspur. She has been capped four times for the England national team. Amy previously played for Manchester United, Liverpool, Lincoln Ladies, Notts County, Sheffield, Leeds United, Doncaster Rovers Belles and Orlando Pride.

James Atkins and Tom Gribbin are co-founders of Planet League. Planet League uses the power of football to mobilise fans to live greener. Since 2020 they have pioneered green tournaments for football fans, running over ten tournaments, including Saints Planet League Cup for fans of Southampton and the Green Gooners Cup for fans of Arsenal, leading to more than 250,000 verified green actions. Planet League are co-founders of Green Football Weekend and Football for Forests, and created Scope F, a new concept for analysing the carbon emissions of the football industry.

Acknowledgments

Many thanks to David Garrido for his support in the preparation of this report.

And to players from the following clubs who took part in our research: Arsenal, Aston Villa, Barnsley, Birmingham City, Bradford City, Brighton and Hove Albion, Bristol City, Brommapojkarna, Charlton Athletic, Chelsea, Como, Crystal Palace, Everton, Fortuna Hjørring, Heart of Midlothian, Huddersfield Town, Inter Milan, Kuopion Palloseura, Leeds United, Leicester City, Liverpool, LSK Kvinner, Manchester City, Manchester United, Portland Thorns, Rangers, Reading, Real Sociedad, Roma, Rosengård, Seattle Reign, Sheffield United, Sunderland, Tottenham Hotspur, Watford and West Ham United.