

#17

Dominique Janssen



CHATting TO US IN THE DAYS BEFORE CHRISTMAS, OUR DUTCH NO.17 OPENS UP ABOUT PLAYING IN MIDFIELD, HER EXCITEMENT FOR THE YEAR AHEAD ...AND THE DANGERS OF RAISING THE FA CUP!

Interview: Zoe Hodges

Dom, you seem to have settled in very well at United. How have you enjoyed your first few months at the club?

The time has flown by. I remember the first day coming in and now we're already having a winter break. I still feel like there's lots to improve, but it's just nice to get into the groove of it. I've been getting used to being around the girls; getting used to the style that we play. I'm also just enjoying the time on the pitch, but also off the pitch – I think that's very important to feel good. Settling down is like a process, so it's not perfect yet.

As well as scoring in the Liverpool game in December, you supplied two assists and Marc Skinner singled you out as being a star player. So it was interesting to hear you say after the game that you weren't completely happy with your performance – are you always that strict when it comes to assessing your own game?

Since coming here, I've started playing in midfield, whereas before, I've played five years as a centre-back. So, I know the position, but it's also getting back in the groove of it. I know it's a position that I can play really well. And I think against Liverpool, I performed pretty good but there are always a few moments in your head where, I know that this was a moment that I could still do better. So, I'm just striving for perfection. I don't think I should be too strict on myself but I think it's also one of my qualities to not be happy too quickly, because I know, for example, then the following week against Crystal Palace, that was maybe not my best performance and that just kind of bothers me, because I want to perform well, and I want to perform every single game well. So, I think it also shows who I am as a person, to not be happy too quickly, but at the end, obviously, I was very happy to get my first goal and to get two assists. →

FACTFILE

DATE OF BIRTH

17 January 1995

POSITION

Defender/midfielder

PLACE OF BIRTH

Horst aan de Maas, Netherlands

YOUTH CAREER

RKsv Wittenhorst

SENIOR CAREER (league only)

2013-15 SGS Essen,

42 games, 3 goals

2015-19 Arsenal,

66 games, 11 goals

2019-24 Wolfsburg,

98 games, 20 goals

2024- Manchester United,

10 games, 1 goal

INTERNATIONAL CAREER

Netherlands, 118 caps, 6 goals

HONOURS

FA Cup: 2015/16

League Cup: 2015, 2017/18

Women's Super League: 2018/19

Frauen Bundesliga:

2019/20, 2021/22

DFB Pokal: 2019/20, 2020/21,

2021/22, 2022/23, 2023/24



Dom has really enjoyed her return to England, helped by making some new friends along the way

The manager has also pointed out how much defensive coverage you give the team. As such, you must take real pride in the vast number of clean sheets we've kept so far this season?

Together with the whole defence and then me playing in the 'six', and the other girls besides me in midfield – just knowing that we can defend really well, it's a nice thought that if you're going to score one goal, you're going to keep a clean sheet and get the three points. It's credit to all the girls involved, because defending starts in the offensive positions as well. People putting their bodies on the line is just generally a really nice thing to see – to see people fighting for everything.

Our attention in the new year is to switch to the cup competitions – we're in the League Cup quarter-final v Manchester City and we have the FA Cup to defend. You've won both already, of course. What memories do you have of the 2016 FA Cup final, when Arsenal beat Chelsea?
I didn't start, but I came on, and I

remember just winning it, with Kelly Smith being unbelievable, Dan Carter scoring an unbelievable goal, and then just walking up the stairs to get the trophy. It's like a memory you will never forget. And one other funny thing, I don't think anyone has seen it, but after we got back down with the trophy, the trophy has a lid on it, so I just wanted to lift the trophy, but the lid fell off, and it fell on my head! My fellow Dutchies at the time were almost on the floor laughing at me! But it was a beautiful day.

You've since won even bigger trophies than that, but back then as a young player was it a nerve-wracking experience? What advice would you pass down to the younger players here at United about preparing for such moments?

When you're young, you're going to put more pressure on yourself, but it's very important that you just enjoy what you're doing. Because the older players will always tell you – enjoy it because before you know it, you're going to be 30, and I am turning 30 soon, and it's like, wow, your career goes by so fast. So you should really,

“Every girl out there wants to play one day in the WSL. That's very nice to see and one of the reasons why I came back”

really enjoy it, but also just put in all the effort you can, and really try to become better every day.

As for the League Cup, incredibly this season's final will be a decade on from when you first won it with Arsenal. How do you look back on that time in English women's football, generally speaking, compared to how it is now?

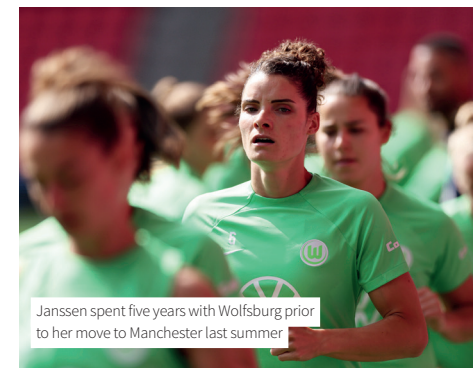
Good question. I remember at the time that England did really well in the World Cup in 2015 so when I came in the league [Arsenal signing her from SGS Essen that year], you could tell there was some progression going on. And since seeing that more and more people want to come to the English league – I think right now, for every girl out there, they want to play one day in the WSL – that's a very nice thing to see. That's also one of the reasons why I came back to the WSL [from Wolfsburg last summer], because it's just a very competitive competition, and I still think it's pretty English – the English style, there's going to be a lot of dueling. Every weekend, you have to give it your all; you have to fight for the points.

The Arsenal side you played in won every domestic trophy going when you were there. It's interesting to see that the cup wins came first during that period – the League Cup (2015), then the FA Cup (2016), then the WSL (2019). Did you have a sense of those cup successes giving you the belief to make the next step as a team?

It's very interesting, because when I came to Arsenal, there was a transition going on at the club, because they had been very successful, and then some of the players eventually stopped and younger players came in, but we could still rely on the experience from the older players. That's why we won the cups, and then, from just getting more experience playing at the highest level, we eventually won the league. It's something that grew and grew up until the point that we got it. You work every day together so hard to



Wisely lifting a flag (rather than the trophy) above her head after winning the Women's FA Cup in 2016



Janssen spent five years with Wolfsburg prior to her move to Manchester last summer

get better, and that was just the whole process of winning the cups first and then eventually being so consistent to win the WSL, because in England, it's never easy to win it.

Our latest FA Cup opponents West Brom are in a lower league but will no doubt prove a different kind of test. We'll be strong favourites, but it can be really hard facing a team we might not know too much about, and for whom it'll be such a massive occasion...

It's one of those games you go into, and you just have to be 100 per cent because whatever league you're playing, a cup game is something special. Every team within a cup competition, they know it's a knockout game. So you have to be there on the day; you have to perform at your best. Even if they're one or two leagues below you, that doesn't mean that it's going to be an easy game, so we'll have to be on top of our game and perform well to progress.





Away from club football, you have a big year ahead in 2025 with the Euros coming up. How much are you looking forward to hopefully being a part of that Netherlands side, and has the banter between any of your English team-mates started as the Lionesses look to defend their title?

I'm really looking forward to it. I also think it's going to be in a beautiful country – I'm very excited to see more of Switzerland. The girls here haven't really said anything about defending the championship, but obviously we're going to be in a group together, and it's a very tough one [alongside France and Wales in Group D], but I'm really excited to have such good opponents and also so many club team-mates that I'm going to face in the Euros. It's just a very exciting thing that's happening.

Sarina Wiegman was your manager when you won Euro 2017, of course. Tell us about how you found Wiegman as a manager...

She's a really good manager; she knows what she's doing, she has a plan ready. She manages everything around it pretty well – she knows her strengths and uses them correctly. England also winning the Euros, then becoming vice-champions at the World Cup – it's a very similar route we had with the Dutch team. Seeing how big it became in England – people from the team, they became celebrities basically! They can't walk down the street without being recognised. That's a process that happened in the Netherlands as well, and Sarina had a really big part in it. It's really nice to see she's doing so well, but hopefully when we play them, they are not doing too good!

United's men team have had a few legendary Dutch players over the years – including three with a 'van' in their name! – so as a club did you



The home win against Liverpool in December was one of Dom's best displays yet in the United shirt

follow them closely? And we have three Dutch players in the men's team now of course...

I knew Ruud van Nistelrooy already a little bit before, because one time he came to see the national team, and we had a chat about his experience as a professional. It's funny, because one time I was on holiday in the Netherlands and at a restaurant. He was sitting there with his family, and I was there with my best friend, and it was like, 'oh, hey!' – he recognised me, and obviously I recognised him. As a human being, it's just really nice to have someone that's so open and spontaneous, like every time when we pass the guys going to training. That's also something that I would expect as a Dutch person; we are very open and friendly.

Much is made of your versatility, and as well as playing centre-back at Wolfsburg, you've also filled in at full-back. Do you have a preference?

I really enjoy the 'six' role. It's very challenging, because obviously you're in the middle, and you have to scan 360 degrees, whereas in the centre-back role everything's in front of you. I like that the

"I really enjoy the 'six' role. I like that the manager is challenging me and putting me in that position"

manager is challenging me and putting me in that position, because I know I can still become a better player. That's one of the reasons why I moved here, because I don't want to settle down. I'm here to become better and also have success with the club.

One big trophy missing from your career is the Champions League, with your Wolfsburg team going so close in 2023. How much of an ambition is it of yours to add that to your collection?

I think it would be big for the club as well if we



The 2019 World Cup finalist is looking forward to another big international competition this summer

reached it. United were very close last season to reaching the Champions League group stage. It was very unfortunate with the draw [against PSG]. But in the end, if you want to compete in big competitions, you have to play against bigger opponents. In this season we've been doing well. I don't think we have played our best football yet, but we have the results so far. So we're competing for the spot [in the UWCL], and I really hope we can make it happen. Obviously, it would be great to, first of all, reach the Champions League with this club, and then in the next years – I don't know how long I'm going to play for – but if I would be able to still win the Champions League, it would be a dream come true.

You have a bit of a milestone birthday coming up in January – how do you plan to celebrate that? Thirty is nothing in modern football terms, right!

I know 30 is a big age, so I've put in the effort to organise something. I've asked all my friends and family if they're able to come over. It's also a big weekend, because we play Man City away, so it's nice that everyone that is coming over can also come and watch the game. We can play the game, they can come to watch it and I can celebrate afterwards. The next day, I will have a day off, and spend a little bit more time with friends and family, take them out for breakfast and just say a massive thank you to them for celebrating it with me. I'm really excited! ●