

#8

Grace Clinton

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OUR NO.8 HAS BEEN FEELING THE LOVE THIS SEASON, AND TODAY'S SET TO BE ANOTHER BIG DAY FOR THE 21-YEAR-OLD AS SHE GOES UP AGAINST SOME FAMILIAR FACES. FROM STARTLED CELEBRATIONS, TO CITY BREAKS, TO SHIRT NUMBERS, SHE SHARES ALL...

Interview: Zoe Hodges

Grace, you've hit the ground running since returning to United. We're speaking to you ahead of a quiet weekend - it must have been a bit frustrating for you all to see the Chelsea game called off...

Yeah. It was very frustrating. You know, as footballers, we just want to play all the time. If we could, I think we'd always have three-game weeks. So, yeah, it's a bit disappointing. I was really looking forward to it personally, but it does give us more time to prep for the next game. So, it's not always the worst thing after a busy week.

You joined the club two years ago, but it's been a long wait for your debut with those two loan spells in between. Was it worth the wait when you finally walked out with your United team-mates against West Ham last month?

One hundred per cent. Getting a goal and to actually make my debut at Old Trafford, it was definitely worth waiting for. I think being out on loan, I've learned so much, and I've really enjoyed my time out, so I think it's all been good timing.

You scored not just on your United debut but at Old Trafford as well. You looked like you couldn't quite believe it! Tell us what was going through your mind when you saw that ball hit the back of the net...

I don't really know... sometimes I just think like that, when I score, sometimes I don't believe that I've scored! It's just a weird feeling. Obviously, you think, 'am I offside?' I had a lot of space in that moment. Then Teri [Elisabeth Terland] reacted. I couldn't really believe it but when all the girls were celebrating, that's when I realised.

Purely from a football point of view, which of your two goals this season was the best, in your opinion?



FACTFILE

DATE OF BIRTH

31 March 2003

POSITION

Midfielder

PLACE OF BIRTH

Liverpool

YOUTH CAREER

Everton

SENIOR CAREER

2020-22 Everton 21 apps, 1 goal

2022-present Manchester United

3 apps, 2 goals

2023 Bristol City (loan),

15 apps, 6 goals

2023-24 Tottenham Hotspur (loan)

27 apps, 5 goals

INTERNATIONAL CAREER

England: 3 caps, 1 goals

HONOURS

Women's Championship

winner 2022/23

PFA Women's Young Player

of the Year 2023/24



“My time in Bristol was massive for my career, to turn me from a baby into a woman. I learned a lot”



Grace impressed hugely across 27 games for today's visitors last term



Teri lets a stunned Grace know the good news against West Ham!

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I think non-emotional wise, just looking at skill and stuff, I'd say probably my Everton goal is better because I was a bit calmer, I had to do more to score. I'd say emotionally, I think my debut one. So, on a personal level, the West Ham goal was bigger for me, because obviously it had a lot of things attached to it, like making my debut for United.

You've spoken in an interview previously about your friendship with Maya Le Tissier. Now she's your club captain, how has she helped you and the new players adapt to life at Manchester United?

Maya joined at the same time as me, but she's just settled in so well, and she's just a big character within the group. I think everyone respects her. She's a leader on and off the pitch for me, you know. She leads by example in her work ethic on the pitch and then off the pitch, she's just clear in her communication. She's someone that people can go to with anything, and she'll help them. So, I think she's a really good leader for us to have.

You spent time on loan at Bristol City in your first season at United, helping them win promotion to the WSL in 2022/23. How was that experience playing in a lower league different to the top division – and you must have enjoyed capping that season off with a trophy as well?

I think it's important for any young player to go and do that. The WSL is a big step for young players, and it's fast tempo. I think just going to the Championship and playing every week, really getting yourself fit, getting yourself strong – because that league is just as competitive, and you don't know if you're going to win every week, like it is *really* competitive between all the teams! So, for me, it was massive for my career to sort of turn from a baby into a little bit of a woman. And yeah, I learned a lot from that spell and winning the league was a bit crazy as well, because it was a title race between us and another team [Birmingham City]. So, there was a lot of learning for me to take from Bristol. I really enjoyed it.



You then had a successful loan spell with our latest opponents Tottenham last season. How valuable was your time there to your development?

It was crucial, as it was my first proper year in the WSL. They really helped me and supported me, and they gave me a lot of freedom, and they gave me a lot of encouragement to be me and play how I wanted to play. It allowed me to be the player I'm starting to become now. I really respect and appreciate Tottenham for that part of my journey.

This is the first time we've faced Spurs in a competitive game since the FA Cup final, of course. It must have been a strange sensation for you watching that...

It was very difficult for me. I think there was a massive conflict of interest. Obviously the team that I'd fought so hard for all season to get there... all I want to do is play and win, because I'm a competitive person! At that moment in time, I want to get my hands on that cup. But then obviously it's my club that I've been at for two years, and all my friends and people that I know are on the other team. So, it was a really weird feeling for me to deal with on the day and leading into it, to be honest.

You're clearly going to come face-to-face with a lot of your former Spurs team-mates from last season in our latest game – what's that going to be like for you?

It's really exciting. I think Tottenham are a decent side, they're doing well so far. So, it's really exciting to test ourselves against a good side. It's going to be nice seeing my friends, hopefully I'll have a bit of an advantage knowing how they play and stuff! But, it's going to be really nice and I'm really looking forward to it. This game is a good test for us, and we'll be up for it.

Last season also saw you get your first call-up for England, and you scored on what appeared to be a dream debut [against Austria in February]. What did that mean to you? With Euro 2025 on the horizon, do you have your sights set on being a part of that squad?

Scoring on my debut was, again, just amazing. It couldn't have gone any better for me. I think it's the biggest honour to play for England and so when I got the call-up, and when I knew I was starting, it was just such a surreal moment. You're playing with people that you've watched win the last Euros, and you've watched for such a long time, and now you're playing alongside them. So yeah, it makes you feel really amazing. Obviously you want to play every game that you can for England, and you want to be going to every camp. So, I always have big ambitions to keep getting selected.



The midfielder's strength, skill and shooting ability was evident against Everton in our last WSL outing

We remember reading that you had quite a typically English response to getting that first call-up from Lionesses manager Sarina Wiegman...

Yeah, I was quite surprised! It was very early on last season, and I just didn't expect it, and then I didn't know it was her that was ringing. Once she told me, and she spoke to me for a bit, I was like, right... I think I need a cup of tea now! I was taken aback by it.

You were born in Liverpool, you've recently lived in London, and now you're now back living in Manchester. What's your favourite thing about Manchester? And if you had to recommend a weekend city break to someone, which of three cities above would you go for?

Ooh, good question! In Manchester, my favourite thing to do is go for coffee and brunch. It's such a quirky city and there's so many places that you can go. If I was to tell someone to go for a weekend away, I think London's too big because it's just really hard to get around – you need to know where you're going! So, I wouldn't say London. I could say Liverpool but there's not enough to do, so I'd say



On the training ground with good mate Celin



Tag-teaming with Tooney on England duty in April this year

“It’s not just goals and assists I play for. I love tackling and winning the ball back... that’s why I love the no. 8!”

Manchester. There's loads to do, it's not as busy as London, and you can really get about and have nice food and coffee.

That's what we like to hear! You're again wearing the no.8 shirt this season, as you did for Spurs. Is that the number that best sums up your role on the pitch, do you think? And is there a legendary no.8 you associate it with?

Yes, for me personally I'd say that's how I love to play. It's

not just attacking and goals and assists that I play for. I love tackling people and winning the ball back for the team and recovering back as well. So that's why I love the no.8. One of the greatest for me with that number is [Andres] Iniesta.

Away from football, what are your preferred ways to switch off from the game and get some headspace?

I spend a lot of time with my bestie Celin [Bizet], we do a lot of things together. Then I love to go for coffee and read, and I love cooking too.

And finally, what are your hopes for this season with United, individually and as a team?

This is a big club, and we have big expectations. So, we want to win every game, we're very competitive. We're always looking to challenge for the league and cups, because I think that's the expectation of a Man United team. Then, personally, I'd love to go and win Young Player [PFA Women's Young Player of the Year award] again and just keep going to England and keep performing for the team so that we keep winning every game. ●