

READER'S LIVES

In this issue, Danny Wittenberg interviews the recently signed US National Squad player Crystal Dunn, who plays for Chelsea Ladies Football Club

CRYSTAL DUNN

D.O.B: 03.07.1992

BIRTHPLACE: New York, USA

POSITION: Defender/midfielder/forward

Crystal Dunn aims to bring glistening qualities on and off the pitch after joining Chelsea Ladies from Washington Spirit in January. Speaking to the official club magazine shortly after finalising her move to Stamford Bridge, the US international showed all the hallmarks of a superstar signing

Explain why you chose to sign for the Blues?

I really admire Chelsea right now because they're freaking dominating! The club has a great group of girls and on the men's side

Antonio Conte has it down. What is unique about the club is how close-knit the women's and men's teams are and I think that bodes well for us in the WSL. I feel like Chelsea has a large fanbase, so I'm excited about the games and to see all the supporters.

I don't know much about London or England going into this, but when I came on my visit there was something that grabbed me. The whole family aspect of Chelsea – the unity, the family morale – is making it feel just like home. If this was going to be my new home for a while, I wanted to feel as comfortable as I possibly could.

Do you expect a culture shock when you swap the US league for the WSL after winning the Golden

Boot and Most Valuable Player in three great seasons with Washington?

Although I think the awareness of women's soccer in the US has become incredible, the English game has come so far. When our women's national team plays England, they're 1-0 games now, which wasn't the case five or six years ago. I'm happy to be here while the teams are improving and awareness is growing because I get to feel that energy.

How hard was it to leave your home country behind?

The decision was really difficult because I'm going to miss my family. There were obviously mixed emotions, leaving home and signing a contract



Crystal Dunn (left) plays a recent game

when you're going to be away from your loved ones for a long time. There'll probably be some days where I cry and call home but I'm going to give it my all and I think my excitement is overpowering my nerves. I think this is something I have to do personally and for my career. You can't put off these experiences. I'm 24 and I feel ready to try and make really large improvements to my performance. It's a grace period with the national team because there's no World Cup or Olympics, so for me it's the right moment to commit to a new club and take my game to another level.

Have you been playing football from a young age?

I come from a small town called Rockville Centre on Long Island, New York, where everyone plays soccer. All the parents put their little four-year-olds into pickup soccer [a park game where anyone can join] and I had a lot of energy, so that's what mine did for me. Since it was such a tiny place, everyone who I played with every single year went to high school with me, so it was just playing with your friends. We grew up with a love of the game.

It was your glittering college career that made you first pick in the 2014 National Women's Soccer League draft in the States. Was your ambition always to turn professional?

I had a really great time at college and I enjoyed every moment of it, but people will be surprised that I wasn't super committed to playing professional soccer until I was in my second year. I just wanted to be the best player I could be and the rest fell into place. To be honest, though, I don't know anything but soccer. It's a life that a lot of people don't understand – some of my friends have a family and kids, and they don't get why I'm just playing soccer. I have always enjoyed it and it has been an amazing journey so far.

You looked delighted to pick up the No19 shirt at Chelsea. Why is it so special to you?

I'm so excited to have that number! I wore No5 in my first year of college but the No19 jersey came out of retirement when I was in my second year and Mia Hamm [the two-time Olympic gold medallist and World Cup-winning US striker], who had it when she was playing at the University of North Carolina, asked me to wear it. My first reaction was that I didn't want to play badly and ruin the number! She said it would mean a lot, so I wore it for three years, won a ton of awards in it and eventually retired it again. I'm not one of those people who believes in luck, but Mia's jersey is still very special to me. I'm very happy it was made available at Chelsea – and Diego Costa is wearing 19 so this is a good number!

As you approach 50 caps for the US Women's National Team with 18 goals so far, have you found the secret to being part of the most successful female team of all time?

Being an American women's soccer player is mostly about working hard. We kill each other in training. We are built in with that mentality not to stop running until we're literally dragging our body on the ground, but we still pick our team-mates up and support each other. I think that attitude embodies me as a player. I am very competitive in training but I'll be the first person to jump out of crazy tackles. I compete with my team-mates but it's about trying to make everybody better and not being overly aggressive around them.

What do you hope to bring to the dressing room at Chelsea?

I definitely think I'm a dressing-room leader but I'm a good listener as well and that comes with leading. Some people think the leader needs to be the only one speaking, hyping everybody up in the huddle, but sometimes being a good leader and a good team-mate is about listening to the others. Hopefully, my team-mates can learn something from me, but this is going to be a new experience for me and I'm excited to learn from them too.

Will you be staking a claim to the speakers before matches?

I love music! I don't want to go in and claim the speaker but I just want to let the girls know, if they need a DJ, I'm available at all times. I love all types of music, so I'm always the one who gravitates towards the boom box. I'm all about finding the right music to get everybody involved and ready for the game. I love Rihanna – I will bump Rihanna all day – but I'm old school too. I'll listen to some Backstreet Boys randomly and people ask what I'm doing.

What hopes do you have for this season?

I want to set the bar high. Let's go undefeated! It's going to take work and it isn't going to be easy because there are some really great teams in this league. I like us to take it game-by-game, day-by-day. I love short-term goals because then your long-term goals are going to fall into place. It would be a dream to play in the Champions League and that's something that I'd love to cross off. Most importantly, I'm ready to help out the team in any way, so I'm excited to see how I react and join forces with these girls.

If you would like to feature in our Reader's Lives article in a future issue, please contact helen@theamericanhour.com

COMPETITION!

WIN ONE OF THREE PAIRS OF TICKETS TO CHELSEA LADIES VS. YEOVIL TOWN ON 30 APRIL 2017

Chelsea Ladies Football Club was established in 1992, and has been affiliated with Chelsea Football Club since 2004. They currently play in the FA Women's Super League.

The Ladies WSL season runs from March until October with the team also competing for the FA Women's Cup and Continental Tyres Cup.

Chelsea Ladies play their home games at Wheatsheaf Park in Staines.

In 2015, Chelsea Ladies won a famous double, becoming champions of the FA Women's Super League for the first time and winning the FA Women's Cup at Wembley Stadium.

To enter our competition to win one of three pairs of tickets, please email your details to damian@theamericanhour.com by 15 April. Please be sure to put **CHELSEA LADIES** in the email subject.

Terms and Conditions: Tickets are available for Chelsea Ladies vs Yeovil Town on 30 April only, not transferable for any other fixtures, no cash value, games are played at Staines Town FC, Wheatsheaf Park, for more info visit www.chelseafc.com/ladies. Travel and accommodation not included. The winner will be notified by email.

