

## \*Academy

The Arsenal Academy confirmed its fine reputation last season, winning the Academy League and FA Youth Cup 'double'

→ While results are not the be all and end all for an Academy side, a winning mentality at youth level is never a bad thing, and the class of 2008/09 certainly has that.

In a stunning FA Youth Cup run highly-rated opponents such as Aston Villa, Tottenham and Manchester City were beaten in some style before a wonderful 6-2 aggregate win over Liverpool in the Final. Highlights included Gilles Sunu's fine hat-trick against Wolves in the fourth round, a memorable late double salvo at White Hart Lane in the last eight and a four goal blitz in the first-half of the semi-final, second leg against Manchester City. The final itself saw Liverpool beaten 4-1 in front of 33,662 at Emirates Stadium before the job was completed with a 2-1 triumph at Anfield.

The story in the Academy Premier League was equally as successful. Having won their ten-team regional group by a remarkable 25 points, the Under-18s prevailed in the national competition with fine play-off wins against Manchester City in the semi-final, and Spurs in the final at White Hart Lane. There were impressive performances throughout the side. Exciting young forwards Rhys Murphy, Luke Freeman and Benik Afobe all reached double figures in the goalscoring stakes. Captain Jay Emmanuel-Thomas led by example with 13 strikes



FA Youth Cup winners 2009

of his own from midfield while the likes of Kyle Bartley and Luke Ayling caught the eye at the back.

Overseeing the Academy's operations is Head of Youth Development and Academy Manager Liam Brady, the legendary midfielder – and he is ably assisted by David Court, another ex-Gunner, and former professional player Roy Massey. The Under-18s themselves are coached by former Arsenal defender Steve Bould, and are instilled firmly with the first-team's footballing ethos.

Naturally the success of the Academy will

ultimately be judged on its development of players. A large number of Arsenal Academy alumni are now playing with success at first-team level with Arsenal or elsewhere in the Premier League and Football League. Mark Randall, Jay Simpson, Henri Lansbury and Gavin Hoyte were among those to feature in the first-team last season, while Jack Wilshere achieved the distinction of becoming the Gunners' youngest-ever league player when he turned out against Blackburn in September 2008.

Alongside Jack in the current first-team squad, the likes of Nicklas Bendtner, Vito Mannone, Johan Djourou and Kieran Gibbs have also progressed through the Academy – while other Premier League players like Ashley Cole, David Bentley, Steven Sidwell, Fabrice Muamba and Sebastian Larsson are also graduates.

Loan moves are also an important part of a player's development as they gain experience elsewhere – and Emmanuel-Thomas, Lansbury and Simpson are temporarily swapping Arsenal colours this season. The Carling Cup also provides many of the Club's youngsters with the stage to make their name at first-team level – with last season's 6-0 and 4-0 humblings of Sheffield United and Wigan Athletic respectively pointing towards the depth of talent being nurtured. ■

## \*Ladies

The curtain came down on Vic Akers' 22-year reign as Arsenal Ladies manager in typically triumphant style

→ The 2008/09 season proved the end of an era for Arsenal Ladies, with long-serving manager and club founder Akers moving into an 'upstairs' role after having served as first-team manager since 1987. Fortunately, the campaign was a winning one for England's most famous and successful women's team. Brushing off the disappointment of an early exit from the UEFA Women's Cup, which they won so memorably in 2007, the side rallied to scoop a superb domestic 'treble' – and how.

Beating Doncaster Rovers Belles 5-0 to win the League Cup Final at Scunthorpe United's Glanford Park, they then faced Northern Division side Middlesbrough in the FA Cup Final at Derby County's Pride Park – winning 2-1 and collecting the 31st major honour of Vic's reign, and indeed

the Club's existence.

The 32nd, and perhaps the most dramatic of them all, came just six days later on May 10. Arsenal Ladies needed to travel to title rivals Everton and win in order to secure their sixth consecutive Premier League title, and 11th in all. In an heroic, battling performance they won 1-0 through an early goal by Scottish striker Suzanne Grant – crowning Vic's tenure in memorable style and to wild celebrations.

Last season's success was all the more satisfactory for the upheaval it came in spite of. The mid-season departures of key players Kelly Smith, Karen Carney and Alex Scott to the new American league, as well as the pregnancy of the prolific Julie Fleeting, necessitated a shuffling of the pack and several new arrivals – with the squad going on to compensate superbly for the quartet's absence.

This season, experienced Scottish coach Tony Gervaise, who assisted Vic last season, steps up to manage the team with Vic moving to a position as director of football. It is a move that looks to blend continuity with progression as Arsenal Ladies strives for another winning campaign on all fronts.

As well as the first-team, Arsenal Ladies comprises a reserve team and sides at Under-16, 14, 12 and 10 levels. A full-time Academy is also in operation and



Katie Chapman

16-19 year-olds, combining football and academic study. Two weekly development sessions also take place in Borehamwood and at Harvester FC, aimed at girls aged between seven and 14.

As in the past six campaigns, this season each member of the Arsenal Ladies squad will be sponsored by a player from the men's first-team who plays in their corresponding position.

Arsenal Ladies play their home games at Boreham Wood FC. More information and tickets for games can be found by ringing 01727 747452. ■

**\*fact**  
Between 2003 and 2009 Arsenal Ladies remained **unbeaten** for **108** consecutive domestic matches

## \*info...

\*David O'Leary is Arsenal's all-time leading appearance maker. He played 722 times for the first-team, scoring 14. He also played more matches at Highbury than any other player – taking to the field 348 times in total.

\*Arsenal are the first London club to reach the final of the European Cup/Champions League.

Arsenal played 2,010 games at Highbury, won 1,196, drew 475 and lost 339. They scored 4,038 and conceded 1,955.

\*The first goal scored at Emirates was by Klaas-Jan Huntelaar of Ajax

in Dennis Bergkamp's Testimonial.

Arsène Wenger has won seven major honours at Arsenal (three league championships, four FA Cups) – more than any other Gunners boss.

\*Arsenal's league record in 2003/04 was played 38, won 26, drawn 12, lost 0 – the only time in the

modern era a side has remained unbeaten for an entire league season.

In 2007/08 season Arsenal completed a Club record number of matches unbeaten in all competitions. Starting on April 9, 2007, it spanned 28 games before being ended on November 28, 2007 by Sevilla. The previous record, of 24 games, had been set in 2002.

\*No other club in the world had more players at the 2006 FIFA World Cup than Arsenal, who sent 16.

Arsenal have twice clinched the league title at White Hart Lane (1971 and 2004). In addition the Gunners have won the league at Old Trafford (2002), Anfield (1989) and Stamford Bridge (1933 and 1934).

\*Arsenal's 100th goal at Emirates Stadium was scored by Emmanuel Adebayor in the 3-0 FA Cup win over Newcastle on January 26, 2008.

In the 2001/2002 season, 22 Arsenal players earned a Championship medal, including three goalkeepers. \*In the 2005/06 season, Arsenal set a record for most consecutive

clean sheets in the Champions League with ten. During the campaign they did not concede a goal for 996 consecutive minutes. Assistant Manager Pat Rice has been involved in all of Arsenal's 'double' seasons, playing in 1971 and assisting Arsène Wenger in 1998 and 2002.

\*Gael Clichy is the youngest player

ever to win a Premiership winners' medal, at 18 years and ten months. Arsène Wenger was the first foreign manager to lead a team to the English League Championship.

\*Arsenal are the only team to score in every game in a Premier League season, achieving the feat in the 2001/02 championship campaign.