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2025 Vitality Blast women's competition - county-by-county preview

The Vitality Blast women's competition county-by-county preview compiled by journalists from the ECB Reporters Network supported by Rothesay.

BEARS

Previewed by Brian Halford, ECB Reporters Network supported by Rothesay

Captain: Georgia Davis

Overseas players: Laura Harris (Australia, full competition)

Key winter moves: Bears entered the new era needing to keep up without the Joneses (Amy and Eve) after they departed to The Blaze and Lancashire respectively. That drained the top order of experience which the signing of Laura Harris is designed to rectify while Sterre Kalis is on a season's loan from Yorkshire.

The big question: Consistency has proved elusive for the Bears in the early weeks of the season so can they find enough to be contenders for the T20 title? They have individuals capable of match-winning exploits, and have pulled off some eye-catching run chases in the 50-over comp, but is the group good enough to challenge?

Wildcard watch: Amu Surenkumar, a highly talented, 18-year-old all-rounder from Rugby School who can change games with bat or ball. Played for England Under-19s earlier this year has the ability to make a big impact if her chance arrives after the important matter of her A Levels are out of the way!

Final thought: A fast start is always a massive asset in a group campaign and Warwickshire have been handed a very tough opening with away games at The Blaze and Essex. Emerge from that double-header with at least one win and who knows what might happen for a team whose highly-talented spin trio - Georgia Davis, Hannah Baker and Charis Pavely - can put any side under pressure?

DURHAM

Previewed by Graham Hardcastle, ECB Reporters Network supported by Rothesay

Captain: Hollie Armitage

Overseas player: Suzie Bates (New Zealand, full competition)

Key winter moves: Durham have signed a plethora of eye-catching talent, some young, some experienced. England stars Hollie Armitage, Lauren Filer,

Bess Heath and Mady Villiers are chief amongst them. New Zealand batting legend Suzie Bates will be key to their hopes of success. Given the importance of quality spin in T20 cricket, the presence of gun leg-spinner Katie Levick in Durham's line-up may be most telling.

The big question: It's been an inconsistent start to the summer for Durham in the Metro Bank One-Day Cup, winning three of eight matches. Perhaps that's understandable given this was a newly assembled squad for 2025. But, a couple of months down the line, can they kick on in the Blast and challenge the competition favourites such as The Blaze and Lancashire Thunder?

Wildcard watch: Grace Thompson. The 17-year-old fast bowler has all the attributes to be a future star for Durham and England. Tall, pacy, accurate and with, seemingly, a good temperament. Think Lauren Bell, and you won't be a million miles off if you haven't seen her. Amazing Grace? Quite possibly. If Thompson gets it right in the Blast, she will be hot property.

Final thought: The next couple of months are key for the progression of women's cricket in Durham. With the likelihood of bigger crowds for Blast fixtures than 50-over matches at the Banks Homes Riverside, this is a great opportunity for this new professional side to really build a connection with cricket lovers, especially children, in the North East. Silverware is important, of course it is. But there's somewhat of a bigger picture at play in this summer's Blast for Durham Cricket.

ESSEX

Previewed by Ben Kosky, ECB Reporters Network supported by Rothesay

Captain: Grace Scrivens

Overseas players: Maddie Penna (Australia, full competition)

Key winter moves: Seasoned opener and wicketkeeper Lauren Winfield-Hill has moved to Chelmsford on a loan deal from Yorkshire for the duration of the Blast. The arrival of Penna – part of the Adelaide Strikers squad that won successive Women's Big Bash League titles – will strengthen Essex's options in the middle-order batting and leg-spin departments.

The big question: How do Essex reshuffle their bowling attack to compensate for Sophie Munro's absence? The seamer caught the eye during Sunrisers' T20 campaign last year, finishing as their leading wicket-taker, but is currently out with a back injury. Despite their potent spin line-up, Essex will need alternatives to fill Munro's role at the back end of the innings.

Wildcard watch: Esmae MacGregor. The 20-year-old can vary her pace and bowled well in the powerplay overs during Essex's recent T20 County Cup defeat to Yorkshire. Although she featured more prominently in 50-over cricket last season, Munro's injury could mean that MacGregor finds herself shouldering greater responsibility in the shorter format over the coming weeks.

Final thought: Essex should be capable of posting challenging totals in this tournament. As well as Winfield-Hill and Grace Scrivens at the top of the order, they can expect runs from the likes of Cordelia Griffith, Jodi Grewcock and Sophia Smale – while Jo Gardner, who begins the Blast in impressive form with the bat, could take on the finisher's role. But they will also need to develop a ruthless streak that has so far been lacking in their 50-over campaign.

HAMPSHIRE HAWKS

Previewed by Alex Smith, ECB Reporters Network supported by Rothesay

Captain: Georgia Adams

Overseas players: Charli Knott (Australia, full competition), Ellyse Perry (Australia, last six matches + Finals Day if Hawks qualify)

Key winter moves: The Vipers to Hawks transition saw more outgoings than incomings – with the likes of Danni Wyatt-Hodge, Georgia Elwiss, Emily Windsor, Alice Monaghan and Charlie Dean all departing. With younger players given more chances and responsibility. But one new face looms large - the Australian great Ellyse Perry.

The big question: Will Ellyse Perry get Hawks over the line when she arrives? There is huge excitement about Perry's signing but her introduction at Chesterfield on July 4, with six matches to go, may well be perfectly timed to

get them to Finals Day, but equally Hampshire could be only playing for pride.

Wildcard watch: Mary Taylor. The fast bowler missed the start of the season with a finger injury but her return in the Vitality County Cup saw her take a four for 26 in an innings none of her team-mates went at under 10s and Surrey smashed 237. A bustling and uber-accurate presence with the ball, Taylor is also more than capable of bunting late-innings runs.

Final thought: The likes of Ella McCaughan, Rhianna Southby, and Bex Tyson massively stepped up in the first Metro Bank One-Day Cup block to fill the experience void, and send Hampshire top of the 50-over table. A replication of that, and Maia Bouchier shaking off her Ashes disappointments, put Hawks in a good position to continue the proud record of women's cricket at Utilita Bowl. Paul Prichard and co. have seamlessly made sure there has been no disruption since Charlotte Edwards' exit.

LANCASHIRE THUNDER

Previewed by Graham Hardcastle, ECB Reporters Network supported by Rothesay

Captain: Ellie Threlkeld

Overseas player: Katie Mack (Australia, first three group matches), Alana King (Australia, from match four onwards)

Key winter moves: Lancashire were busy ahead of 2025. Eve Jones arrived and is currently one of county cricket's in-form batters. She's been joined by England fringe fast bowler Grace Potts and Scotland spinner Darcey Carter. Batter Katie Mack will start the Blast before being replaced by one of the competition's standout overseas signings, her fellow Australian Alana King, the superstar leg-spinner.

The big question: Lancashire have started the summer brilliantly, winning six of eight matches in the Metro Bank One-Day Cup, before lifting the T20 County Cup. Can they transfer that momentum into the Blast? If so, they will definitely be a force. They look to be well balanced, with strength across all disciplines. In the regional era, Thunder's only knockout cricket came courtesy of a 2023 Charlotte Edwards Cup Finals Day appearance.

Wildcard watch: Left-arm Sophie Morris is another one off a Lancashire spin-bowling conveyor belt which has nurtured Sophie Ecclestone, Olivia Bell and Hannah Jones in recent times. The 21-year-old played in the regional Charlotte Edwards Cup during the last two summers and, in a 2022 Academy T20 friendly, returned an astonishing 6-0. Her maiden senior five-for came against Durham earlier this month.

Final thought: Ashes rivals, Thunder team-mates. You could well see a spin bowling partnership of Sophie Ecclestone and Alana King during this summer's Vitality Blast. Aussie leggie King loves Emirates Old Trafford. In 2021, she took a hat-trick there whilst playing for Trent Rockets in The Hundred, a particularly proud moment given it was at the scene of her idol Shane Warne's ball of the century to Mike Gatting in 1993.

SOMERSET

Previewed by Andy Stockhausen, ECB Reporters Network supported by Rothesay

Captain: Sophie Luff

Overseas players: Amanda-Jade Wellington (Australia, full competition)

Key winter moves: Seam bowlers Laura Jackson and Ellie Anderson have been recruited to provide a cutting edge with the new ball, while England international spinning all-rounder Charlie Dean was brought in to add star quality. Perhaps more significantly, the services of Australian leg spinner Amanda-Jade Wellington, a proven match-winner at this level, were secured for a second season.

The big question: Although competitive for the most part in their previous guise as Western Storm, a relatively inexperienced side tended to come up just short in close matches. Can this revamped Somerset squad improve on that record and demonstrate the knowhow needed to challenge for the latter stages?

Wildcard watch: Alex Griffiths. Thrust into the role vacated by the injured Dani Gibson, the talented Welsh all-rounder is ready to realise her full potential. Adept at bowling seam up under pressure during the death overs, she now possesses the range of shots and confidence required to be an

effective finisher with the bat.

Final thought: A series of shrewd signings and the availability of their international players has transformed erstwhile strugglers into more consistent performers in the Metro Bank One-Day Cup this season. Confidence and momentum gained from a series of impressive victories in the 50-over competition can now be harnessed to render Somerset competitive in the short format. As ever, much will depend on the form of overseas star Amanda-Jade Wellington and the availability of England pair Heather Knight and Charlie Dean.

SURREY

Previewed by Jon Batham ECB Reporters Network supported by Rothesay.

Captain: Bryony Smith

Overseas players: Grace Harris (Australia, available from June 5 until the end of competition)

Key winter moves: The big arrivals over the close season are England international Danni Wyatt-Hodge and Australian Grace Harris, both free-scoring batters who fit the profile of a side renowned for aggressive run-making. Alice Monaghan also comes in from Hampshire to offer options with both bat and ball.

The big question: How will they fit all the batters in? An already strong line-up now includes Harris and Wyatt-Hodge, the former possessing a higher strike rate (155) in international T20 than any batter achieved domestically in the format last year. Bowling stocks, be that seam or spin are hardly light either, even with skipper Smith and vice-captain Tash Farrant currently battling injuries.

Wildcard watch: Emma Jones. The all-rounder, a student of veterinary surgery at Cambridge, has had three separate contracts with The Hundred franchises, but been held back by injury. Trent Rockets have kept faith for 2025 when Jones' height with the ball and long levers with the bat may mean that faith is rewarded.

Final thought: Under the guise of the South East Stars, the bulk of this group made Finals Day in the Charlotte Edwards Cup in three of the four years it was contested. Only Sophia Dunkley and Alice Davidson-Richards will miss the start of the competition on England duty while rival sides are harder hit. Smith returned from injury during the T20 County Cup and her captaincy and powerplay hitting will be valuable to lead a squad with enough class and depth to be a contender.

THE BLAZE

Previewed by Jon Culley, ECB Reporters Network supported by Rothesay

Captain: Kirstie Gordon

Overseas players: Maddy Green (New Zealand, first four matches), Heather Graham (Australia, last 10 matches)

Key winter moves: The big change for The Blaze has been off the pitch, where former New Zealand Test batter Craig Cumming takes over as head coach in place of Chris Guest, who guided the Trent Bridge-based team to its first silverware in the Charlotte Edwards Cup T20 competition in 2024. Cumming arrives with a winning pedigree, though, having won two trophies in four years with Otago Sparks.

The big question: After last season's impressive campaign established The Blaze at the top of the pile in the 20-over format, can anyone knock them off their perch? South East Stars, who ran them closest in 2024, have morphed into Surrey Women, with whom The Blaze shared 692 runs in an incredible 50-over tie at Beckenham earlier this month. There may be little between them over 20 overs too.

Wildcard watch: Charley Phillips - Such is the depth of The Blaze squad, some 15 of their number are already signed up for the 2025 edition of The Hundred. If they are to be joined by another team-mate, it may be Charley Phillips, who arrived from Sunrisers in the close season as a young bowler with pace and has already made a good impression.

Final thought: The Blaze squad contains four current England players but it is their Scottish triumvirate - skipper Kirstie Gordon and the Bryce sisters,

Kathryn and Sarah - who are the heart of the team. Gordon was the leading 20-over wicket-taker in 2024, Kathryn Bryce the top runscorer and wicket-keeper Sarah had only one in front of her in the dismissals table. They may hold the keys to success again in 2025.

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