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# Charlotte Edwards Cup team-by-team previews

## CENTRAL SPARKS

*Previewed by Brian Halford - ECB Reporters Network*

**Captain:** Eve Jones

**Head Coach:** Lloyd Tennant

**2023 finish:** Seventh

**2023 highest run-scorer:** Erin Burns (185)

**2023 highest wicket-taker:** Erin Burns & Bethan Ellis (9)

**The big questions:** How will Sparks fare without Erin Burns, their top scorer and joint leading wicket-taker last year? Will Burns' fellow Australian import, Courtney Webb, be similarly effective? Can Sparks find the consistency needed to emulate their progress to the final in 2022?

**Player to watch:** Katie George – dynamic all-round force in the team who can turn games in all three ways, as a forceful batter, potent left-arm seamer and exceptional fielder.

**Young gun:** Charis Pavely – batting all-rounder who burst into the Sparks side last summer with a style which earned her a first professional contract and selection for England Under 19s. Fearless with the bat – a potential T20 matchwinner.

**Final thought:** If Sparks can fire collectively rather than sporadically, then they can challenge hard. That ability to produce the best consistently is what separates winners from also-rans.

## **NORTHERN DIAMONDS**

*Previewed by Graham Hardcastle - ECB Reporters Network*

**Captain:** Hollie Armitage

**Head Coach:** Dani Hazell

**2023 finish:** Fourth

**2023 highest run-scorer:** Hollie Armitage (216)

**2023 highest wicket-taker:** Katie Levick (12)

**The big question:** The Diamonds were hurt by last season's group-stage exit, missing out on Finals Day following a last-day defeat to 'Roses' rivals Thunder, who qualified instead. Diamonds fell away having started with four wins. Can they use the painful memories positively this season?

**Player to watch:** Leg-spinners in short-form cricket are gold dust, and in experienced campaigner Katie Levick the Diamonds have the very best in English domestic cricket. In 21 Charlotte Edwards Cup appearances, she has two five-wicket hauls to her name.

**Young gun:** All-rounder Phoebe Turner, 20, is one to watch. A developing seamer and a middle order batter with power and poise, she is a confident cricketer who has enjoyed an excellent start to the season in 50-over cricket with the ball, claiming 10 wickets.

**Final thought:** The Diamonds have enjoyed an encouraging start to the season in the 50-over Rachael Heyhoe Flint Trophy, winning four of their first six matches. They are a team with experience of big matches having reached four finals in all across the two formats since 2020. They won't be favourites for this title, but write them off at your peril.

## **SOUTH EAST STARS**

*Previewed by Jon Batham - ECB Reporters Network*

**Captain:** Bryony Smith

**Head Coach:** Johann Myburgh

**2023 finish:** Fifth

**2023 highest run-scorer:** Bryony Smith (256)

**2023 highest wicket-taker:** Danielle Gregory & Phoebe Franklin (7)

**The big question:** Traditionally, Stars have been disrupted in the shorter format by England call-ups, but with only Alice Capsey on duty versus Pakistan can they recapture the form which saw them become inaugural winners in 2021.

**Player to watch:** Sophia Dunkley – Overlooked by England, if Dunkley can return to her destructive best, she will lend support to Bryony Smith and a top order which lost three wickets in the powerplay three times last season.

**Young gun:** Alexa Stonehouse – Fresh from her exploits at the Women's U19s World Cup, Stonehouse offers the prospect of wickets in the powerplay, plus some power hitting either down the order or even employed as a pinch-hitter should that role be required.

**Final thought:** Even making allowances for international call-ups, Stars were underwhelming in this competition in 2023. Their batting either misfired in the powerplay or failed to build on good starts given by Bryony Smith. They also had no bowler among the top 10 wicket-takers.

## **SOUTHERN VIPERS**

*Previewed by Alex Smith - ECB Reporters Network*

**Captain:** Georgia Adams

**Head Coach:** Charlotte Edwards

**2023 finish:** Winners

**2023 highest run-scorer:** Danni Wyatt (273)

**2023 highest wicket-taker:** Anya Shrubsole & Linsey Smith (13)

**The big question:** Will it be a three-peat? Vipers have won the past two editions of the Charlotte Edwards Cup, and have only lost two matches in that period. When everyone is available the line-up looks formidable.

**Player to watch:** Georgia Adams is simply the best regional player never to have played for England. She glistens after taking home the PCA's overall MVP plus, the individual CEC and RHFT awards last season. Expects more runs, more wickets, and incredible captaincy.

**Young gun:** Charli Knott has settled in at Vipers like a homegrown player. The Australian has mixed heavy scoring with the bat with pressure-building off-spin in the RHFT, and the 21-year-old has serious T20 pedigree having been named the Young Gun at last winter's WBBL.

**Final thought:** 'Little Lottie' has found a nice home on the south coast and 'Lottie' does not want to relinquish her. Six England call-ups will throttle the first couple of matches but once Vipers are at full strength they have a line-up that could mix it at international level. Anya Shrubsole's retirement does leave a bowling hole, but winter recruit Freya Davies should fill that.

## SUNRISERS

*Previewed by Ben Kosky - ECB Reporters Network*

**Captain:** Grace Scrivens

**Head Coach:** Andy Tennant

**2023 finish:** Eighth

**2023 highest run-scorer:** Cordelia Griffith (205)

**2023 highest wicket-taker:** Mady Villiers (10)

**The big question:** Sunrisers' transformation into serious contenders in 50-

over cricket during the past year has been remarkable. Can they transfer that winning habit to the T20 format, having completed the tournament's past two editions without a victory?

**Player to watch:** Having impressed in last winter's Women's Big Bash League, Australian seamer Nicola Hancock brings pace and variation to Sunrisers' bowling attack. The 28-year-old will represent a potent wicket-taking weapon in both the powerplay and death overs.

**Young gun:** Academy graduate Amu Surenkumar, still only 17, contributes runs in the middle order as well as providing a useful medium-pace option and will surely benefit from her recent experience as part of England Under-19s' T20 side in Sri Lanka.

**Final thought:** While Dane van Niekerk's planned return was eventually shelved, Sunrisers can still turn to fast-scoring batters like Cordelia Griffith, Grace Scrivens and Jodi Grewcock, along with a range of spin options and a top-quality seamer in Nicola Hancock. They should have enough to be competitive and win some games, even if a knockout place might remain elusive.

## THE BLAZE

*Previewed by Jon Culley - ECB Reporters' Network*

**Captain:** Kirstie Gordon

**Head Coach:** Chris Guest

**2023 finish:** Runners-up

**2023 highest run-scorer:** Georgie Boyce (200)

**2023 highest wicket-taker:** Nadine de Klerk (15)



**The big questions:** Having won all their matches with the exception of the final in 2023, The Blaze clearly like the short format. A slow start has hampered them in the Rachael Heyhoe Flint Trophy this year and some confidence-boosting early wins look key.

**Player to watch:** Fresh from leading Scotland Women to their historic qualification for this year's T20 World Cup, all-rounder Kathryn Bryce will be looking to back up her form with a big contribution in the domestic tournament.

**Young gun:** The 21-year-old wicketkeeper-batter Ella Claridge has impressed in The Blaze's 50-over side in the absence of Scotland international Sarah Bryce, hitting a career-best unbeaten 64 in the win over Western Storm. She surely justifies a place even with Bryce back.

**Final thought:** Injuries and international call-ups undermined The Blaze's start in 50-overs cricket, leaving them short in the batting, but the return of the Bryce sisters from Scotland duty and 2023 top scorer Georgie Boyce from injury - plus the signing of Australia's Heather Graham to cover Nadine de Klerk's absence with South Africa - should make them competitive again and another appearance at Finals Day should not be discounted.

## **THUNDER**

*Previewed by Graham Hardcastle - ECB Reporters Network*

**Captain:** Ellie Threlkeld

**Head Coach:** Chris Read

**2023 finish:** Third (beaten in semi-final on Finals Day)

**2023 highest run-scorer:** Fi Morris (209)

**2023 highest wicket-taker:** Olivia Bell (11)

**The big questions:** Can Thunder better last season's semi-final finish? They advanced beyond the group stage for the first time in either regional competition. Despite being beaten by eventual champions Southern Vipers, it felt like the moment this region arrived on the scene.

**Player to watch:** Thunder have signed powerful Aussie batting all-rounder Georgia Voll as their T20 overseas player. A key member of the Brisbane Heat team at home, she scored a red-ball double century off only 238 balls opening the batting in an Australia Possibles v Probables trial match in March.

**Young gun:** Thunder have significant top-order strength, and in-form England A star Seren Smale is central to that - Voll and Emma Lamb too. Wrexham-born Smale, 19, is the second leading run-scorer in the early-season Rachael Heyhoe Flint Trophy with 286, posting scores of 99, 58 and 67.

**Final thought:** It hasn't been the start to the season Thunder would have wanted, winning only two of six 50-over matches. But they lost some games that on another day they would have won, and there have been signs of progression under new coach Chris Read, the former England Men's wicketkeeper-batter. But he will know that winning is the only definite way to prove that.

## **WESTERN STORM**

*Previewed by Andy Stockhausen - ECB Reporters Network*

**Captain:** Sophie Luff

**Head coach:** Trevor Griffin

**2023 finish:** Sixth

**2023 highest run-scorer:** Fran Wilson (186)

**2023 highest wicket taker:** Dani Gibson (8)



**The big question:** Capable of upsetting even the best teams on their day, Storm have what it takes to cause a surprise or two. It remains to be seen whether they can muster the consistency needed to establish themselves as genuine title challengers. Much will depend on the continued progress of emerging young players such as Sophia Smale, Niamh Holland and Emma Corney.

**Player to watch:** Amanda-Jade Wellington. The Australia international has afforded the Storm attack a new dimension. An experienced performer, who can spin the ball both ways, she will exert pressure and take wickets. A potential match winner.

**Young gun:** Sophia Smale. Already acknowledged as a talented slow left arm spin bowler, the England under-19 international has spent the winter working hard on her batting. Determined to attain true all-rounder status, she is certainly one to watch.

**Final thought:** With Wellington joining Sophia Smale and Chloe Skelton this summer, spin will undoubtedly be Storm's strong suite. Expected to be without the services of England trio Heather Knight, Dani Gibson and Lauren Filer, they are likely to remain heavily reliant upon the experienced pair of Sophie Luff and Fran Wilson for runs. Lack of strength in depth may count against them.

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