The England Roses were long seen as consistent semi-finalists – respected for their discipline and effort but rarely regarded as serious contenders for world titles. That perception changed dramatically in the last decade.

Through strategic leadership, tactical evolution, and the emergence of world-class players, England has become one of the most competitive and dangerous teams in international netball.

Their rise has been defined by a strong development system, significant investment in player performance, and most importantly, a clear and evolving style of play that now allows them to go toe-to-toe with the world's best.

Notable Coaches and Their Contributions

- **Tracey Neville** (2015–2019): A pivotal figure in England's rise. Under her leadership, the Roses won their first-ever major title, the 2018 Commonwealth Games gold, beating Australia 52–51 in the final. Neville promoted a fearless style of play and helped instill belief in the team. She also strengthened the link between domestic netball and international performance, fostering a winning culture.

Neville is currently the head coach of the Melbourne Mavericks in the Suncorp Super Netball league in Australia. Elenor Cardwell and Sasha Glasgow are notable English players growing the club aside from Neville.

- **Jess Thirlby** (2019–present): Thirlby took over during a transitional phase and focused on building squad depth, rotating players, and expanding tactical versatility. She led the team to their first-ever Netball World Cup final in 2023 and continues to promote a high-performance environment that supports emerging talent while maintaining experienced leaders.

England's Style of Play

What makes England's current style unique is its balance. They combine the structure and discipline of Australia and New Zealand with the flair and athleticism often seen in Caribbean netball. The result is a style that is tactically adaptable and

suited to multiple playing conditions.

Key characteristics of England's play:

- Controlled, phase-based attacking play
- Creative and confident feeding into the circle
- Tactical defensive pressure using clean intercepts and strategic positioning
- Depth-based squad rotation that allows for multiple effective combinations

Attack: Structure with Explosiveness

- **Natalie Metcalf**: Plays a central role in building structured attack. As wing attack, she maintains composure, creates space with precision timing, and delivers accurate feeds.

"Metcalf also boasts Vitality Roses experience, winning the Commonwealth Games in 2018 and co-captaining the side to a World Cup silver medal in 2023" ~ NSL

- **Alice (Alecia) Scholes**: Brings high energy, speed, and unpredictability. Despite her height (163m), her ability to drive hard onto the circle edge and deliver daring feeds makes her a dangerous option.

"In the 2025 Super Netball League, Scholes was part of the league winning team, the London Pulse – taking their first championship ever!" ~ NSL

- Helen Housby: A world-class shooter known for clutch performances. Her movement and shooting consistency are backed by years of top-level experience with the New South Wales Swifts in Australia's Super Netball.

At the end of the regular 2025 Suncorp Super Netball season, Houseby sits top of the log for Super Shots (60) and top of the log for Super Shot attempts (98).

“Helen Housby… sank the gold medal-winning shot at the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games”~ SSN

“Housby’s speed and shooting prowess keeps defenders on their toes from start to finish” ~ SSN

- **Eleanor Cardwell**: A strong, mobile shooter with the ability to hold space or rotate out. After helping the Adelaide Thunderbirds win the 2023 premiership, she joined Melbourne Mavericks under Tracey Neville. Her experience in multiple positions and leagues makes her one of the most adaptable and durable attackers in the game.

“Hailing from the United Kingdom, Eleanor Cardwell made an immediate impact on the competition, playing a key role in the Adelaide Thunderbirds 2023 Premiership.” ~ SSN

“The defender turned shooter plays a key role in the England Roses’ shooting circle and is one of the headline Mavericks signings” ~ SSN

- **Jo Harten**: Though now retired from international duty and a recent departure from professional netball, Harten was a crucial figure in England’s rise. Known for her long-range shooting and strategic playmaking, she brought years of Australian league experience to the Roses and helped shift England’s attacking mindset.

“Unflappable and almost unbeatable, Jo Harten is one of a handful of imports who’ve changed the face of the competition.” ~ SSN

Defence: Strategic, Disruptive, and Disciplined

- **Funmi Fadoju**: A standout young defender whose timing, vertical leap, and fearless intercepts have made her a key weapon in the Roses’ setup. Despite

her height (176cm), she consistently disrupts world-class shooters and brings unmatched energy to the defensive circle.

Fadoju played a large role in the England Roses making the 2023 Netball World Cup final, alongside veteran Geva Mentor.

“Fadoju was named Netball Super League Young Player of the Season in both the 2021 and 2022 seasons and her form soon earned her a first Vitality Roses cap against Uganda in 2022” ~ NSL

“Her performances in 2024 once again impressed, with Fadoju topping the standings for intercepts with 50, 20 more than the next player” ~ NSL

- **Layla Guscoth**: A composed and cerebral defender who controls space through intelligent positioning. Known for her ability to read the game and make clean, effective challenges.

Guscoth has played for Loughborough Lightning, Hertfordshire Mavericks and Team Bath in the Netball Superleague and for Adelaide Thunderbirds in Suncorp Super Netball. She is now retired to focus on her medical career.

- **Imogen Allison**: Plays predominantly at wing defence. She is relentless in applying pressure, excellent at contesting passes, and plays a major role in England’s transition from defence to attack.

“The athletic midcourter heads to Australia with a proven pedigree as a winner and leader at English Super League level having debuted with the Yorkshire Jets in 2016 before enjoying great success at Team Bath including reaching the 2021 Grand Final in a campaign where Allison was named Bath’s Player of the Year.” ~SSN

“Allison joined the Manchester Thunder ahead of the 2024 season, helping the club to a Grand Final appearance in her sole campaign with the team.” ~SSN

- **Fran Williams**: Offers a calm and technical option at goal keeper. Her

footwork and discipline make her a reliable last line of defence, particularly in high-stakes matches.

“In her debut season in SSN, Williams was second in the League for defensive rebounds.” ~SSN

Transition and Midcourt Play

One of England’s strengths is their ability to transition quickly and cleanly from defence into attack. Their midcourt players, particularly Metcalf, Scholes, and Allison, are well-drilled in moving the ball diagonally and into space. England doesn’t rely heavily on fast breaks but instead uses smart passing and structured movement to keep possession while building attacking opportunities.

Adaptability and Squad Rotation

England’s tactical approach under Thirlby includes flexible combinations and squad depth. Rather than relying on a single starting seven, Thirlby rotates players throughout tournaments to manage fatigue, test pairings, and keep opponents guessing. This approach paid off during the 2023 World Cup, where England reached the final for the first time in history.

Major Milestones

- 2018 Commonwealth Games: England defeated Australia 52–51 in the final to win gold. Helen Housby scored the winning goal in the final seconds, marking a turning point in the team’s history.

- 2023 Netball World Cup: England reached their first-ever World Cup final after a commanding semifinal win over New Zealand. Although they lost to Australia in the final, the tournament confirmed England’s place among the global elite.

- Multiple players have also found success in Australia’s Super Netball league, such as Jo Harten, Helen Housby, Eleanor Cardwell, Imogen Allison and Sasha Glasgow, helping to bridge the gap in playing standards between England and the traditionally dominant nations.

Final Thoughts

The England Roses have built a game plan that reflects their growth as a team: smart, structured, and fearless. They've moved beyond being a competitive side to become serious title contenders. With players like Housby, Cardwell, Fadoju, and younger talents like Scholes rising fast, the Roses are not just chasing glory. They are building a long-term legacy. Their style of play is no longer an imitation of others; it's distinctly English – measured, tactical, and increasingly, unstoppable.