

## [Transcript] Conversations / How Julie became Matilda #1

ABC Listen. Podcasts, radio, news, music and more.

During the recent World Cup,  
there was this clip you might have seen  
that was coming around social media  
of all these people sitting in a plane, in economy,  
and every single screen was on the insanely gripping  
penalty shootout between the Matildas  
and the French women's team.

And when the winning shot was delivered by Courtney Vine,  
you can see the whole plane erupt into ecstatic cheers.

Well, not quite the whole plane.

There was actually one dude trying to watch  
a Lord of the Rings movie in the middle of all that mayhem.

And fair enough, not everyone is into sport,  
but blocking out the World Cup  
required enormous determination at the time.

It was almost impossible not to get swept up  
in all that joy and excitement and good feeling.

It wasn't quite like that in 1979  
when a teenage Julie Dolan captained  
the first Australian women's team  
in a match against New Zealand.

On that day, there were just a few spectators,  
mostly family, friends and officials.

But Julie Dolan is one of the people  
who helped build this juggernaut  
that is the Matildas from the ground up.

And she's seen the Matildas grow from obscurity  
to the front page of the New York Times.

Hi, Julie. Hi, Richard.

How are you feeling watching that penalty shootout against France?

I think like the rest of the nation,  
the heart wasn't going so well,  
where it was such a tense time  
and everyone sitting around me was super, super quiet  
until that Courtney Vine shot that sent us into the semifinal.

Then I've never seen a place erupt like I did that night.

Where were you watching it from?

I was actually, believe this or not,  
I was actually at home and I was at home  
because I had visitors arriving from Switzerland that night.

And you won't believe this either.

They arrived at the end of extra time  
and before the penalty shootout.

## [Transcript] Conversations / How Julie became Matilda #1

It's going to be the gracious host,  
but I just called out over the balcony,  
hey, you know, leave your bags, come in, grab a cold beer,  
sit down, don't say a word.  
And that's how I ended up watching the game that night.  
What were you thinking and feeling when you saw  
that there were 80,000 people in that stadium to watch that match?  
It's a very surreal feeling for myself  
or any of the pioneering players who played  
in that first international match.  
There were 200 spectators  
and that might put it into perspective.  
I walked into that stadium that night,  
there were 80,000 spectators all cheering for the Matildas  
and it's very, very surreal.  
It's something that we probably always dreamed of,  
possibly thought we'd never see.  
The only thing I've ever seen like it in my lifetime  
that I'd be present for was the 2005 AFL Grand Final  
and there's a certain noise that a stadium that large,  
full of extremely excited people make  
that's like no other noise on Earth, is it?  
It's deafening.  
But it's full of joy, excitement and hysteria, even.  
And people are jumping, they're screaming.  
It's a very, very exciting atmosphere.  
When Courtney Vine took that shot,  
Dylan Alcott, Australian of the Year,  
was watching it from his wheelchair  
and he said it's the closest he's ever come to standing up.  
I think that's got to be the comment of the tournament.  
And that's what it was like for everybody.  
They had all these moments that took them to a different place.  
And what were these Swiss guests like  
when they realised they'd come to stay  
with a completely insane human being?  
Who was getting excited about that gig?  
Fortunately they were into football.  
So one of the guys just walked straight out,  
he said I can't do this, it was getting way too tense.  
So he did walk outside.  
To be cheering a match is one thing,  
but to know that a stadium full of people  
and the whole nation,

## [Transcript] Conversations / How Julie became Matilda #1

and many people beyond the nation,  
are cheering alongside you, must be lovely.  
It's an experience I never thought I'd get,  
but just to put that into perspective as well,  
I walked out of the local store the other day  
and this 35-year-old trade, he stopped me  
and he said go the Matilda's!  
And I said yes of course!  
And 20 minutes later,  
we finished talking about Mary Fowler,  
Caitlin Ford, Courtney Vine and Claire Wheeler.  
And I found that all over the place.  
Did he know who you were?  
It was a fairly small community where I am,  
so they do know of me.  
And he may have known me, but I certainly didn't know him.  
But I found that everywhere.  
People just talking to me and talking about football.  
People are never expected to talk about football.  
The Matilda's went from being not seen,  
to being very seen.  
Like I said, the front page of the New York Times.  
How do you think that happened?  
What's happened here?  
It feels like something has shifted in Australia,  
or maybe it already shifted and we've only just noticed it.  
The major shift is visibility.  
So prior to the World Cup  
and possibly some of the other bigger tournaments  
that we've been in,  
female visibility hasn't been there.  
So what's happened with social media  
is they are now influencing what people see.  
And people are choosing their own content.  
So they're moving in droves to the content they like,  
like the Matilda's.  
And that in turn is influencing mainstream media.  
So it's gone full circle.  
But social media has played such a big part  
in bringing the female sportsperson to the fore.  
So it's gone from a situation  
where you used to have to get scraps of news  
from the mainstream media.  
It's a situation where social media,

## [Transcript] Conversations / How Julie became Matilda #1

a groundswell of social media,  
has pushed its way up into the mainstream media.  
That's right.  
It's now, yeah.  
Because mainstream media influences attitudes and opinions.  
So that's a very significant thing.  
Now it's social media who have,  
they've garnered this support  
because people want that content.  
And that's gone back to mainstream media.  
And so now that's what they're producing.  
How did you first start kicking a soccer ball around, Julie?  
Well, I'm one of six kids.  
I've got four brothers and one sister.  
So there was always a game of football on in the backyard.  
And it was fierce.  
My brothers certainly didn't want to be beaten by a girl.  
And so my sister and I were always up against it.  
And it was tough. Take no prisoners.  
So that's where I started.  
But that's pretty much where it ended too,  
in terms of competition.  
So how did you then stumble on a proper competition  
to start playing in?  
I was at hockey trials one night for a rep team.  
Because that was considered an acceptable women's sport  
back in the day, wasn't it?  
Yeah, that and a few other pursuits.  
You know, a netball.  
Tennis.  
Yeah, things like that.  
Horse riding, maybe.  
But I was at hockey trials one night  
and one of the girls left early and she said,  
I'm off to football training.  
And I was stunned.  
So the next week when I got there, I said,  
look, you know, what is this football training?  
She said, I'll come along.  
And that's when I stumbled upon one of the best teams around  
at that time.  
And that was St George Budapest.  
St George Budapest.  
Now, was that one of those soccer clubs that was started up

## [Transcript] Conversations / How Julie became Matilda #1

by what, Hungarian migrants?

Yes.

I'm assuming in Australia in the post-war years?

That's right.

Much like all the football clubs that were started off at that time.

How did they find players?

Was it people like you who just said, I want to join?

People like me had been around for a long time.

And they, you know, they were probably playing in boys teams or practicing with boys teams.

And that's one of the best development environments you can have.

So they'd been on the periphery for so long.

And then one particular person and her husband took the bull by the horns and they organised the first competition in New South Wales.

So, and she was a part of that team.

And that team, I mean, there were no age groups back then.

So I was 14, they were 30, 35.

Oh, right.

Really?

You're playing with women in their mid-30s.

Yeah.

And the whole age range in between.

So, and that was the same of every other team at that time.

So, but the competition was established.

So, and that's all that mattered.

So we all got together, started playing in this competition.

And it was the first women's competition in New South Wales.

My producer, Nicola, found a media scrap from the 1970s from around that time.

It was a man writing in the Sydney Morning Herald about a women's league game, the Blacktown Spartan Ladies Shield match.

And he predicted it would be, quote, a boots and all fur will fly affair.

And he wrote about one of the players who he said, really caught my eye.

I took her number, phone number, home address and vital statistics.

Yeah.

I mean, and that was how it was at the time.

You know, reporting was possibly a little bit sexist.

## [Transcript] Conversations / How Julie became Matilda #1

But for us, it was getting media attention.  
And whatever media attention we got was media attention.  
And what was the club culture like  
at St George Budapest at the time when you joined?  
That was great.  
I remember some of the great players from St George Budapest,  
you know, encouraging us and coming down to training sometimes.  
Really? So there was a lot of encouragement  
for a women's team then?  
Oh, absolutely.  
It didn't, you know, go beyond that.  
They weren't pushing for us to increase in numbers  
or anything like that.  
It was just, okay, we've got a women's team.  
They're pretty good. Let's encourage them.  
So how was then a national team of sorts  
formed from that club competition, Julie?  
We were a club team.  
And there was an invitation tournament in Hong Kong.  
So we were a pretty strong club team.  
But one night at training, the coach said,  
we've got this opportunity to play in this tournament in Hong Kong.  
And one of the players who was previously with them,  
they said, well, we're not going to take you.  
We're going to take the kid.  
And you were the kid?  
I was the kid.  
And I thought, at 14 years of age,  
I thought, I'm going to Hong Kong.  
I did not, until much later in life,  
did not even think about this woman.  
But off we went, the club team to Hong Kong.  
And we were a team from Australia.  
So not a nationally selected team, just a club team.  
What was the objective of some controversy at the time,  
whether you were a national team or not?  
If it was at the time, I'm not too sure about that.  
Or afterwards, I mean, or controversy.  
Certainly, yeah, controversial.  
So it's not a nationally selected team.  
And you've got many other players in Australia at the time,  
saying, well, I never knew about this.  
How come we weren't told?  
This is the 1970s, isn't it?

## [Transcript] Conversations / How Julie became Matilda #1

What does that mean for a 14-year-old to get on a plane to go to Hong Kong and play for Australia?

Playing for Australia is beyond description, really.

It gives you enormous pride.

And you feel this sense of responsibility to show to the world or your opponents just what Australia is all about and what Australians are about.

So it's a very hard-hitting sort of experience if you're up against someone.

But at that time, 14-year-olds just didn't get on a plane and travel to Hong Kong.

14-year-olds didn't really travel on planes.

And without mum and dad.

So off I went.

And it was an awesome experience.

It was something I'll always remember.

We got on the plane.

And when we landed at Hong Kong Airport, because people weren't widely travelled in that time, everyone stood up and clapped when the guy landed the plane.

They were really happy.

What was it like then to meet other women players from all over the world?

Was there a natural camaraderie between the teams or did you stay within your own team largely?

Pretty much stayed within our own teams.

There were quite a few of the other teams at the hotel who we came across.

But because it was all so new, here we were.

The women's competition had basically just started and then we're in Hong Kong.

And there were teams from other countries.

We never knew about that.

I'm mentioning there was no visibility of females in sport back then.

So to know that there were other countries supporting women's football was amazing.

Did you get crowds to see those matches in Hong Kong?

We did get crowds.

And I remember maybe about three to five thousand.

And they were probably just interested parties, wondering what was all going on.

More so than football fans.

## [Transcript] Conversations / How Julie became Matilda #1

Because it was really in its infancy at that point.  
So training with the national team, as you were,  
you were living in northern New South Wales.  
What did that mean when you had to go training  
with the national team in Sydney?  
Yeah, my family had moved north to Ballina,  
initially to Alstonville and then to Ballina.  
So what that meant?  
Well, women's football in that area  
was still in its infancy as well.  
So I couldn't get the level of competition I needed.  
So I would travel to Sydney overnight by bus  
every second Friday night.  
And get to Sydney Saturday morning.  
And I'd log in to someone's place, unannounced.  
But they were all part of the team.  
So I just fitted in around their football plans.  
So we're all going to the same game, same training.  
And then I'd get on the bus on Sunday night,  
go straight back to Lismore, where the bus station was,  
get off, go home, get changed, and go back to school.  
See, you don't do that unless it's a real passion.  
Unless you really love doing it.  
I mean, you're getting no financial support.  
No.  
You're travelling on what, a 10-hour overnight bus trip?  
Yes.  
Which is hideously uncomfortable.  
Yes.  
When you're spending the next day training,  
crashing on someone's floor or on a couch somewhere,  
then going back on what, the Sunday  
is to start school again on the Monday.  
Did people recognise you were in the grip of this passion, Julie?  
I guess my parents did.  
And that's why they supported me so much.  
This is the passion that I had for football.  
And they supported all of us in our whatever passions we had.  
So, yeah.  
And because you're so passionate about the game,  
that's the stuff you do.  
It didn't matter.  
You might have been a bit tired the next day,  
but you're young as well and a bit naive.



## [Transcript] Conversations / How Julie became Matilda #1

So, you just do these things.

How did the local men's team in Ballona get behind you?

Oh, they were great.

And without some of the male champions we've seen, then football probably wouldn't be where it is today.

So, and especially in my case,

I wouldn't be where I am today with all this help that went on behind me at the time.

So, Ballona men's team said,

you know, it was fine for me to come to training.

And so I was training there with the first grade team.

And it was just a great, great level of play that enabled me to stay at a particular point.

Did they, did you want them to play more gently with you, or did you want them to play in this, as they would normally play against other men?

They had their own barometer.

They realised that I was a female.

I was young.

They were men playing first grade.

It's like being at a different weight division in boxing.

Yeah, very much so.

And if they wanted to, they could have tackled me like they tackled the men.

They never did, so they were really, really respectful.

And I could still train with them

and still, you know, get as much as I needed from the training.

But they were great about it

and very, very welcoming, encouraging.

What kind of things were you doing to raise money?

We were doing anything we could think of.

And I was really lucky to have Mum on my side

because she came up with the most inventive ways.

Yeah, like what?

We had casino nights run out of the garage.

And we had roulette tables and high...

Really? Wow.

I know, we went the whole hog.

And we also had high stakes poker games.

And all the locals came round, they flocked round

and spent money because they knew it was for a good cause.

And so that was very lucrative, but we had...

You can make a lot of money doing that stuff,

but then you could have got sidelined into a whole other career.

Well, that's right, yes.

## [Transcript] Conversations / How Julie became Matilda #1

It might have been more lucrative, but yeah.  
Not as healthy, possibly.  
Tell me how your mum made money off the Melbourne Cup.  
She came across this trifecta for the Melbourne Cup.  
So there were about 2034 different combinations of the trifecta  
that could possibly win the Melbourne Cup.  
Sorry, the Melbourne Cup, I'm getting excited here.  
So we'd sit down, we'd write out all those combinations,  
then cut the bits of paper up, staple them together.  
And then we'd... I can't believe I still...  
You know, I still can't believe I did this.  
We'd go to local businesses and give them lots of 100 tickets.  
Because we had to sell 2034  
and say, could you please put this on your counter  
and, you know, everyone that comes into the store,  
you know, say, it's Melbourne Cup, you're going to have a bet.  
And they did it.  
That still astounds me.  
Fortunately, there were policemen ready to look the other way, too,  
because there were a lot of activities just going on.  
Especially the casino nights. Yeah, exactly.  
We did run it by the local constabulary.  
But, yeah.  
So, yeah, very inventive ways.  
And we also had bucket drives  
like the Salvation Army have these days.  
But they were not very lucrative.  
How much work did you do to promote games?  
Prior to the first test in 1979,  
there was no media attention at all.  
So I made flyers and pamphlets at home  
and walked the streets around that area,  
popping them in people's letterboxes.  
So at least some people would know  
there was an international match happening.  
And that's when we got 200 spectators, which was great.  
I don't think we'd ever had 200 spectators before.  
And we did get a write-up in the local paper,  
but it was mainly about the mail ref.  
And that's fine, you know, from what I can recall, it was okay.  
But they were talking about the mail referee,  
not the international women's test.  
When you were given your green and gold uniforms,  
how did that feel to pull them on?

## [Transcript] Conversations / How Julie became Matilda #1

Amazing.

It's an enormous sense of pride.

Something you don't feel in any other pursuit.

And there's that enormous sense of responsibility.

You don't want to let Australians down.

When you go out and compete against anybody,  
you don't want to let Australians down.

It was reported at the time that some of the players  
had to get out the old sewing kit to tweak the uniforms.

Was that the case?

Absolutely.

Especially when we travelled abroad,  
the administrators behind us worked for every single thing  
that we got.

And sometimes, you know, we'd have these jackets presented to us  
prior to the plane flight,

and we were given a sewing kit with our badge.

And, okay, girls, let's get this on to your jacket  
before we get off the flight.

And for someone like me who's really bad at sewing,  
I think the manageress took over.

The stapler might have worked just as well in that case.

Right.

The national team, as it was being put together,  
were made up of players from all over Australia.

So when you had to come together,

it would have been brief, I imagine, for training.

And you would have had to have bonded with each other  
quite quickly as team members in that brief time.

Yeah, that takes me back to a really cherished memory.

And they were the first ever residential training camps  
for the national team.

And still, at that point, there was no money.

So players would fund themselves to get to Sydney.

And then it was about a day's drive out to Camden at that stage.

You know, there was no M2 or M5s or anything like that.

It was just bush.

And in the middle of this bush was the agricultural college.

And that's where my national team coach  
was working part-time at the time.

So he got us together, got us the dormitories  
because the students were away.

And we had these five days, really, really intense training sessions.

And that was the time when we all got together.

## [Transcript] Conversations / How Julie became Matilda #1

We bonded.

We'd seen each other at every national tournament,  
but didn't really know each other.

Certainly didn't know patterns of play.

So it was a great time for us to get together  
and get all that sort of before we jumped on the plane  
and started sewing our badges on.

Did you form profound friendships in that period?

And have you kept them today?

Oh, yeah.

We still talk all the time, usually across social media.

But it's such...

It's a very exclusive club, the Matilda's.

And, you know, you can't buy your way in.

The currency for entry is years and years of sacrifice  
and grit and grind and really hard work.

So every one of those players knows what it takes to be there.

So...

And that's a bonding that never goes away.

So after you left school,

what kind of work were you able to take on between tournaments, Julie?

Essentially just part-time...

Oh, not part-time, full-time work,

but in areas that were not my preferred vocation.

And that was because I'd have to leave jobs

to travel abroad to play for Australia.

Because at that time, women's football wasn't really recognised

and girls didn't play football,

let alone take time off work and travel abroad.

So most employers were pretty good once or twice,

but then it got to the point where it was like,

come on, Julie, we need you at work.

So...

And you needed to play soccer?

Well, I certainly did.

And I didn't get...

Well, they didn't get that,

but they didn't in some cases.

So I left job after job.

And that was to follow my passion.

If there were a career in football, I would have been fine,

but there wasn't.

This is so much like a rock and roll story.

It's what it reminds me of.

## [Transcript] Conversations / How Julie became Matilda #1

You start in a band and you really believe in that band when you start it.  
And no one else...  
You get five people to a gig, but you still really love it and believe in it.  
And you have these marginal jobs on the side to keep...  
To keep you afloat.  
Keep you afloat and you have to quit them all the time, because you've got to do a tour of New Zealand or something like that.  
And you just hang on and you hang on until you can't bear it anymore, almost.  
It seems a lot like the kind of rock and roll on the road lifestyle.  
Very much so.  
And you've nailed it there until things change.  
And you keep working towards that change.  
And unfortunately, that change didn't come in my career.  
There was a lot of progression, but not the change in terms of financial support.  
When you're in a band, you stay together because you really love the music you make together.  
Is it like that with soccer too?  
Very much so.  
And you look forward to bonding with those players again.  
The next time you get the opportunity.  
So it is very much like that.  
Is it the togetherness or the game?  
It's all that.  
It's the passion that everyone has for the game, the passion they have for their country.  
And, yeah, just the camaraderie.  
We'll go to [abc.net.au](http://abc.net.au) slash conversations.  
So you took part in the World's First Women's World Cup in China.  
This was in 1988.  
And this was a time when China hadn't yet opened up to the world.  
Was this a time when China was still most people wearing mouse suits and riding on bikes?  
Is that what you remember?  
That's what we flew into.  
And it was a completely different environment that any of us had been in before.

## [Transcript] Conversations / How Julie became Matilda #1

I remember landing and coming out into the terminal.  
And there was a whole group of people  
milling around in blue suits.  
And it was like out of a book or out of a movie.  
I couldn't believe it.  
And then they started milling around.  
One of the girls with strawberry blonde hair,  
and started touching her hair.  
And I'd never seen that before.  
And they'd never seen anyone with strawberry blonde hair.  
It was just the most bizarre atmosphere.  
And you have blue eyes,  
which was a subject of some fascination  
for people who came to China in those days.  
Were you the subject of a fair bit of, you know,  
intense stares in the streets of China  
as you went about them?  
Yes, on the streets.  
But they were much more interested  
in that strawberry blonde hair.  
And what do you remember of the matches there in China?  
What I particularly remember is pulling into the car park  
prior to the match on a bus.  
And looking across the car park, there were no cars.  
And the whole car park was filled with bicycles.  
But the extraordinary thing, they were all black.  
And I was thinking at the time,  
when I leave the game, how do I find my bicycle?  
So everything was different.  
And we went into the games  
and they'd gotten a lot of the school kids from local areas.  
And they were the spectators.  
And there were a lot.  
And a lot of noise in the stadium.  
So it was really, really different playing  
in that sort of atmosphere.  
People cheering every time.  
It didn't matter which team had the ball.  
So they would cheer both sides.  
After that first World Cup in China in 1988,  
you decided to retire after 14 years playing soccer.  
When you took a bit of an inventory of your life  
and tried to take stock of what you had outside of soccer,  
what was there, Julie, after all those years?

## [Transcript] Conversations / How Julie became Matilda #1

A pair of old boots.  
And that was about it.  
And it's a very different environment to be in.  
Suddenly, all the routine that you know,  
the environment that has kept you so busy for 14 years  
and given you so much is no longer there.  
And it's not possibly not unique to athletes.  
Other people may experience that in a divorce, for example.  
But it's a void that needs to be filled somehow.  
And mine was a much more practical thing.  
I just had to get assets behind me or real estate.  
And that's what I concentrated on doing.  
Yeah, but then there is that gaping forward.  
Did you sort of dread this state?  
Did you know it was always coming?  
No. I don't think you're prepared for that.  
You're not prepared for, okay, there's no more training.  
There's no more people milling about talking about football.  
None of your friends are there.  
And you were the captain, too.  
So you probably used to people looking to you,  
wanting your guidance and advice.  
Yeah, absolutely, to some degree.  
But at the same time, I played in teams of such great players.  
So my job was particularly easy.  
They were great players.  
You didn't have to get out at 28.  
Did you think you had to get out just in time before,  
so you could have something outside of soccer?  
Absolutely. You look around, you've got nothing.  
That's the time that I said, okay,  
you really need to take stock here.  
Are you going to continue this pursuit?  
Because up until that point,  
we'd been to tournament after tournament after tournament,  
and we'd just been to the Pilot World Cup, got back home,  
and still nothing.  
It hasn't resonated at all.  
Did you ever think that one day you could build the sport up  
into something that was a huge...  
It seems really funny saying this,  
but into a huge national institution,  
when you're getting like a couple of hundred players  
at a match, at best?

## [Transcript] Conversations / How Julie became Matilda #1

Pioneering players always.  
We'd been to the Pilot World Cup,  
so we thought there would be a World Cup.  
But if someone said to me at that time,  
why don't you write a script about how a World Cup would look?  
It would be exactly what we've just seen,  
play out in Australia.  
But then I was thinking, like a good script,  
there has to be a sequel,  
and that's the Matilda's lifting the World Cup.  
Yeah, but if we're talking here about that time when you quit,  
it would also have seemed like an impossible, implausible story.  
You could never have sold that script, could you?  
Because no one would believe it.  
No one would have believed that at the time, would they?  
No, they wouldn't.  
And still, to this day,  
I've read various accounts of people saying,  
oh, nobody watches women's football.  
They do.  
Yes, turns out they do, and quite some numbers.  
So there you were, you retired at 28 and you took stock  
and you had a pair of football boots, you said, and not much else.  
Where did you go?  
I went to Japan.  
Why Japan?  
There were opportunities there to get funds behind me  
and, you know, get some assets behind me  
and concentrate on work.  
I wouldn't be back in Australia and tempted to play football.  
So there I went,  
and the first thing I did was join the Nissan football team.  
After about a year, I thought, Julie,  
football has kept you broke for your entire life.  
What are you doing?  
So I had to stop and concentrate on, you know, getting my life together.  
So how did you reinvent yourself in Japan?  
Well, I was lecturing at university, just in English,  
in English, basically, English studies,  
and amassed some real estate behind me.  
And then when I did come home,  
I'd been in buildings,  
in university buildings for 10 years,  
so I just wanted to get out.



## [Transcript] Conversations / How Julie became Matilda #1

I love the garden, love nature,  
and so I studied horticulture  
and I got a great job  
and spent 10 years in that job.  
But then I left because a friend of mine  
on the Central Coast had said to me,  
I've got this great idea.  
And we talked about his great idea, his vision  
to create a school just for football players.  
And I said, that's the best thing I have ever heard  
in football in 30 years.  
And so we went about and did that.  
Meanwhile, the national team in 95 was named the Matildas.  
That's when they took that name, the Matildas.  
What did you think when that name was  
given to the women's soccer team?  
Still in Japan, so I was quite removed  
from the Matildas, from football.  
So I guess that one slipped through to the keeper.  
But the next thing I remember  
was on the eve of the Sydney Olympics,  
the Matildas still thought they had to go out  
and get much-needed funding.  
They're appearing in the Olympic Games.  
This is our national women's football team.  
And they were out fundraising.  
I read that some of the alternative names  
that were put up were the Lorikeets,  
were still the Soccer Twos.  
I think we dodged a bullet with that one.  
We certainly did.  
No, I was recently speaking to the player  
that coined that phrase.  
And we're talking to a local group on the weekend.  
And so she's going to bring that story to the group.  
And it's a fantastic story.  
So like you said, you came back to Australia  
and set up this football school  
on the Central Coast of New South Wales.  
You're looking at young talented players all the time.  
What do you look for?  
I mean, there's obviously the character qualities you want,  
like persistence, a bit of courage, diligence,  
all that sort of thing.

## [Transcript] Conversations / How Julie became Matilda #1

But what physical qualities are you looking for in talented young players?

Physical qualities, you're looking for athletes, people that have been involved in sport.

So in terms of athletic ability, you want everything that you know to be an athlete.

When watching the players in the World Cup, and some of them have that amazing ability to run very fast and stop very, very quickly, twist in a really unusual way and then take a shot.

That's a certain kind of mind-body connection that makes that possible, surely.

Yeah, and that's also a connection that you have with the ball at your feet

that enables you to make those turns.

It's also a lot of practice.

So you practice over and over and over to be comfortable with the ball at your feet and selling feints, selling dummies to other players.

They're highly skilled players.

You were a midfielder rather than a striker.

What qualities does a midfielder need as opposed to a striker?

What are the strongest qualities a midfielder requires?

Strongest quality for any player, let alone a midfielder, is vision.

And vision allows you to read the play.

It allows you to get your head up, see what's on, see what's not on, and then create that play.

When you say get your head up, you mean not look at the ball?

Not look down.

If you're not that confident with your skills, you'll be with your head down looking at the ball.

And that doesn't enable you to see what's going on around you.

And that's vital.

Who's made that run?

Where is that gap?

And can I get the ball to that player that's coming in behind there?

Or in my peripheral vision, who's just about to tackle me?

So vision is everything.

The ability to be that comfortable on the ball

## [Transcript] Conversations / How Julie became Matilda #1

that enables you to get your head up and look.  
That's what it's all about.  
So you're building in your head  
a kind of a 3D map of the field  
using your vision.  
What's in front of you?  
Picture your peripheral vision  
to see what's happening on the side.  
Integrating that in a kind of a 3D map in your head.  
And the other thing that's in that map in your head  
is the ball without looking at it.  
And then you take your shot.  
Yeah, you take your shot  
and ask that you put someone in behind the defenders.  
They take their shot.  
Whatever plays on, you can see it  
because you've got that technical ability.  
And that's what football is all about.  
The technical skills that enables you  
to then look at what's happening around you.  
Do you see that quality in some players at a young age?  
Oh, yeah.  
Oh, yeah.  
And that's what I see in Cooney Cross.  
I see in Mary Fowler.  
I see in Claire Hunt.  
For me, she's had a blinder of a tournament.  
They're all young kids.  
And they've been blooded into this environment.  
That's really high stakes.  
They can't make mistakes.  
But if you watch them play,  
their head is always up.  
Mary Fowler sees these passes  
that maybe nobody else can see.  
And boom, next minute that person has the ball.  
Is it like a state of grace?  
Very much so.  
I mean, it looks good.  
It's a talent and a real skill.  
It's a beauty to it.  
You said it looks good.  
And it does, doesn't it?  
It does a beauty to it.

## [Transcript] Conversations / How Julie became Matilda #1

Yes, very much so.  
You've nailed it there, Richard.  
It's a movement with the ball  
as opposed to the balls there and you're moving.  
By the same token,  
sometimes that just doesn't happen,  
that state of grace.  
You can't summon that all the time.  
Do you see it in the players' faces  
when they can't bring that beautiful feeling on?  
Yes, you see it when the ball's turned over.  
So they've tried to control the ball.  
It might be coming through the air.  
It's bounced off somewhere.  
So immediately their head's down.  
And that's when there's a scramble.  
Whereas I noticed with the Spaniards  
and some of the English,  
the ball would bounce,  
it would fall at their feet  
and they've still got their head up.  
When you're teaching these kids at this football school,  
do you tell them your story?  
Do you say to them things like,  
oh, you kids, you've got it all today.  
You've got no idea.  
We had to stitch our crests  
onto our national track suits.  
It's very funny, the kids at school,  
and it reminds me of myself.  
You're in this environment  
and there's opportunities galore.  
But when they see some of their coaches on TV  
and they're all high-profile coaches  
who coach these kids at the school,  
they say, oh, yeah, that's my coach.  
They're so used to seeing us around the school  
and so used to being coached by us  
that it doesn't have that effect.  
If they saw Caitlin Ford or Ellie Carpenter,  
it would have an enormous impact.  
Whereas we're just the coaches these days.  
And some of them do realize the opportunity,  
but I think a lot of it is lost.

## [Transcript] Conversations / How Julie became Matilda #1

I mentioned that your early years  
are like playing in an indie rock and roll band  
where you all believe in the band and it's hard  
and you're playing in pub gigs for not that many people.  
But you love it.  
This thing you do is wonderful.  
And yet over the last couple of months,  
we've watched the ascendancy of the Matilda's  
into becoming like superstars, really.  
Very much so.  
Where they will have real trouble walking down the street now  
without being mobbed by people.  
How good is that?  
That's fantastic.  
But then they're going to have to deal with this now  
because that's not easy becoming a superstar.  
To become the object of national fascination and gratitude,  
I don't think it'll be that easy in some ways.  
It'll be brilliant in some ways, but not so easy  
when they realize that they're nationally, internationally famous.  
And I thought what I saw in that last game,  
where they were so keen to give back to the public  
and possibly pull off a third place in the World Cup.  
This is the match against Sweden.  
Yeah.  
They had come off such a high when we beat France  
and that penalty from Courtney Vine  
stopped the hearts of the nation.  
And so that euphoria that they felt  
and to come out against England in the next game  
and sort of get smacked around,  
then they were left mentally to get up again,  
get themselves set, to give back to the public,  
to say thank you and go out with a bit of silverware, really.  
And that didn't happen.  
And I thought what I saw at the end,  
when a few players started going down, was mental fatigue.  
And that comes from the weight of expectation.  
And I feel really sorry for Sam Kerr.  
She's got the weight of the nation on her shoulders.  
And the object of national fascination.  
Oh, yeah.  
And she, you know, she's great.  
She does really well with it.

## [Transcript] Conversations / How Julie became Matilda #1

But when she went down and she couldn't get up,  
I think there was a lot of mental fatigue there.  
They had tried so hard and they'd failed in that respect.  
They failed in the public size? No.  
No.  
Yeah, well, we didn't win the big, big heavy cup.  
The big biscuit.  
The big biscuit. We didn't get that.  
But we all had such a good time.  
Particularly in this moment when everyone's still feeling a bit bruised  
coming out of the alienation of COVID.  
Yes.  
In some ways we wanted it to continue,  
but personally, I wouldn't be able to maintain that pace.  
And I don't know about everybody else,  
but those heart-stopping moments, you know,  
the getting to the stadiums, the euphoria in the stadiums  
and celebrations, you know, that just kicked on and on.  
And for me, walking out into the street  
and people want to talk about football.  
And that's a great thing,  
but you're talking about football all day long  
when you haven't talked about it for 45 years.  
So it's a very, very different experience  
and very, very intense experience.  
It's a high workload.  
I know women who are totally into sport  
and also know women who are totally not into sport.  
Yeah, sure.  
But I didn't meet any of those during the World Cup,  
that second category.  
It seemed to me that a lot of women who decidedly were almost anti-sport  
changed their mind in the course of the World Cup  
and got caught up with it and became fascinated with it.  
Something has changed, I think, with the women's World Cup.  
What do you think has changed?  
If we look at the environment that women's football has created,  
it's a very holistic environment.  
We see lots of families gravitate to these games.  
And is that because there's a lack of theatrics  
that tends to plague the men's games now and then?  
Is it because of that holistic atmosphere?  
You know, people feel safe.  
There's parents with their young kids.

## [Transcript] Conversations / How Julie became Matilda #1

So nobody's up there drinking gallons of beer or anything like that.  
Or pursuing ancient ethnic squabbles either.

That's a big part of it.

The men's game hasn't fared so well in recent years with that.

But you'd feel perfectly happy to.

In fact, you'd want to take your kids to the women's game.

Yeah, and it's a great experience.

And these days, it's okay for your son to say,  
geez, I love Mackenzie Arnold.

That's okay.

And that must be such a great feeling as well.

But not only that.

I remember being in the stands when Nigeria beat us.

And yes, we were a bit despondent, but we went outside.

And all the Nigerians are singing and dancing.

They've got the big drums.

And everyone started joining in.

So it was a great atmosphere.

And you find that around women's football.

Yeah.

I think we're all pretty happy for Spain when they won.

Oh, yeah.

Yeah.

And we were asked prior to the tournament to adopt a second team.

And I think most people adopted the reggae girls,  
but sort of they left a bit early.

So you were either going for Spain, England,  
or, you know, one of the other people in the semifinals.

Australians love a second team.

I was in the stadium during the Olympics athletics.

Who do you have?

During the track and field events,

Australia got knocked out pretty early.

And I think it was the high jump or the long jump.

And suddenly the whole stadium got right behind Kazakh stand  
for some reason.

And no one was more surprised than the Kazakh team  
to see the whole stadium roaring for them.

We do like a second team in Australia.

Well, and I noticed you said Kazakh stand.

And that's the underdogs.

We love it when the underdogs get up.

And people were really amazed when the USA went out,  
when Germany went out, when Canada went out,

## [Transcript] Conversations / How Julie became Matilda #1

because suddenly the tall poppies were sitting at home watching the World Cup instead of competing in those, you know, quarterfinals, in the semifinals, and definitely in the finals.

So it was a different World Cup in that respect.

You know, these other teams were, they're starting to show. Something has changed.

It's definitely promoted the position of soccer in Australia. Elevated.

Definitely elevated soccer as a sport.

But more particularly, I think, for women's sport as a whole, I can really only think of women's tennis as being the only other game that's on regularly, that gets large audiences until now.

And it feels like that's changed and changed forever.

Women's sport is really after all just sport, isn't it?

You help build the base of this now towering edifice.

It must have been like watching the Sydney Opera House being built over 20 years or something.

You know, you build the base and you watch it slowly grow from the ground up.

Do you and your fellow Matilda veterans allow yourself a bit of quiet satisfaction when you're together after a couple of quiet beers?

Absolutely.

And people say to me a lot, okay, you must be envious.

And I'm not envious at all.

You can't have pioneering players without, you know, the progression of the game.

But I would much rather be talking about 80,000 people in a stadium cheering on our national women's team than about 200, you know, in the stands when I first played.

So I'm not envious at all.

I am so happy that women's football is where it is.

Julie, it's been wonderful speaking with you and thank you for sharing your fantastic story with us today.

Thank you.

Thank you for your questions.