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Transcript of an interview with
Ann Odong

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ANN ODONG TRANSCRIPT – GAME CHANGERS INTERVIEW COLLECTION

INTRO [LUISA]: *Welcome to GAME CHANGERS, a podcast about trailblazing West Australian women and their contribution to the wonderful game of soccer. This collection was produced and developed by the Centre for Stories and the State Library of Western Australia. Together, we are sharing stories that reflect our state's rich heritage, diversity and history.*

The interviews you're about to hear were recorded on Whadjuk Noongar boodjar, and we pay our respects to their elders, traditional custodians, and knowledge-keepers, who are the first storytellers of this place.

In the lead up to Perth hosting some of the games for one of the world's largest sporting tournaments, the FIFA Women's World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023, we hear stories from local women who rose up against inequality and stereotypes to champion the game of soccer as far back as the 1970s.

We hear from elite athletes past and present considered to be the best in the game, both locally and globally; and we hear from community role models who are courageously making soccer more accessible and equitable for future generations of women, young girls and newcomers of all genders to the game.

Sports media journalist Kris Marano sat down and heard why self-belief, sacrifice and strength is what it takes to become champions of soccer. In this episode, Kris talks to fellow sports journalist, Ann Odong, who travels with the national Matildas team and works as the Digital Content Project Manager for Football Federation Australia. Ann's story begins when her family were forced to flee Uganda as refugees. They resettled in Perth, Western Australia. Growing up in a new country, Ann found the best way to connect with other kids was through a shared passion for playing soccer. Enjoy.

KRIS: Can you tell me about your earliest childhood memories?

ANN: Yeah, my earliest childhood memories are actually, probably not so positive. We had a civil war in Uganda. I'm from Northern Uganda in Gulu, I am an Acholi woman from Gulu. And so the Ugandan civil war was what we were fleeing. So, it's one of those things where you are not too sure if it's an actual memory or if it's just flashes of something when you were so young. But I do actually remember, and confirmed it with my mum, you know, there's a little bit of violence in the early memories. But my first memories of coming to Australia, I remember the flight, I remember how my ears popped and hurt because that was the first time I'd been on a plane. I remember landing in Perth and it being so hot, like, so hot, and thinking, oh my goodness. And then my first years were really about finding where we fit in. We landed in, and were put in an apartment, in Highgate. And then not long after, my parents actually

moved us out of that, in sort of like resettlement housing and moved us into suburbia. Which was really different because I think my earliest memories were recognizing that I was different. Recognizing our family was different because in the streets and the suburbs we lived in, we were the only African, black families there. So, I just remember that. Feeling different, but then wanting really, really quickly to find a way to fit in. And so, for me, that was sport. I was good at sport, I was athletic. My family is athletic, and I think that was the way, quickest way to be able to find my way into Australia and to start to feel a lot more Australian and start to feel a lot more part of this new country that we were in.

KRIS: Yeah. You mentioned that one of your introductions [to Australia] was driving your brothers around to sport to begin with?

ANN: Well, to begin with, there was mum driving the brothers around and I remember used to go to their football matches and training sessions. We were at Lynwood. That was Lynwood Junior Soccer Club from the time the boys were six years old. And I have two brothers. One is five years younger than me, and the other is 10 years younger than me. So, I just remember Francis, we used to like, I'd sit in the car and mum would drive us to Francis' games on the weekend. And, you know, my mum worked really, really hard during the week. She worked as a cleaner. That was the only job she could get when she came to Australia, even though she was highly educated, she had a degree in agriculture, she was lecturing in Uganda, but when she came to Australia, she had three children. There was no job, no money, and it was about how do you make a living as fast as possible? So, she would clean during the week, and then she would take us to my brother's games on the weekends. And I remember now, when I look back on it, I think that was like the freest my mum was, during those games. And I saw another side of her, 'cause she was always quite serious during the week because there was just so much going on. But on weekends was when she would actually let loose. And I laugh and think, that's actually probably where I get my white line fever from, is my mum, because that was just what she was on the weekends. And that's how we found, you know, a community and a family was those families. And we still keep in touch with them. I just remember we didn't have a lot of money. And so, what I played was netball because it was like, that was the cheaper option for us as girls. So, my sister and I both played netball, but I used to remember I just wanted to play football so badly. But it wasn't until 16 that I could actually, I had my own job. So, then I was paying for what I wanted to do. And that was the first time I joined Lynwood Junior Soccer Club, even though it wasn't the junior side of it that I joined.

KRIS: What was it about football that you felt so captivated by?

ANN: I just felt captivated by the freedom. Like in netball you can only go so many spaces. Like you literally are boxed into, you know, if you're a goalkeeper, you can only go up to one third of the court. If you're a goal defender, you can only go up to two thirds of the court. You can use the whole pitch and you could be so expressive and you didn't have to stop after, you know, two or three steps.

KRIS: What was the first year like with Lynwood? How did they welcome you in? What were some of the feelings associated with that time?

ANN: It was so great, to be honest. I think Leo Coppins was my brother's long-term coach, and he was actually the one that said, do you wanna play? And that was the first time that somebody had given me permission to play the game. And I was like, yeah, I do. Like even after I'd dreamed of it, like for a long time, it just still didn't actually feel attainable. So, when he asked me, do you wanna play, it was such a simple question, but it was just, honestly, I look back at it now and those couple of words just opened up

the whole world to me in a way I could never have imagined sitting here now. And just saying yes and the permission to say yes to that invitation.

I remember the first training session, I remember Penny Tanner was there and Penny brought me in and she taught me how to kick a ball. I'd been kicking around with my brothers in the backyard and, you know, doing it on my own. But she, you know, she taught me how to strike a ball and she taught me about goalkeeping, and I became a goalkeeper. For those first couple of seasons, I was a goalkeeper and it was just a different sense of community. I feel like with, well, my brother had that football experience and I kind of looked at it and I, I did enjoy netball, but I just never felt like I was part of the team in netball. I was wanted on people's teams but I never felt part of their teams. I felt like I was, you know, almost like an asset, but not actually enveloped in the team. And football was completely different. Like I wasn't an asset. Like I could just strike a ball. I didn't know how to dive. I had all that raw stuff, but I was still made to feel part of a team even though I wasn't the best player or I wasn't the best contributor, but it didn't matter. Like, that's what I remember. And I remember, you know, players like Kalinda Salmon and they just, they'd been playing for years, but they just still were like, all right, come on in. And it was just such a great first season and such a great time.

I mean, on that pitch for those training sessions, I didn't have to be somebody's surrogate mother, or I didn't have to be somebody's sister. I didn't have to be, you know, the school representative or, you know, captain of the athletics team. I didn't have to be anybody other than me. And there were so few spaces in my life where I didn't have responsibility to bear, and that was just great, that nothing was expected of me. Just to be a good teammate and to play the game and to have fun. And that was the only expectation. I can't remember how many times I would hear if I didn't have a good test, at school, because again, academics, I would hear from my teachers, I expected better of you. And it's like, but why did you expect better of me? Why is it me you expect better of? And I feel like on the football pitch, it was so great because there was zero expectation from anybody. And if I mucked up, I mucked up. Like there wasn't that shame or that admonishment of: why didn't you do better? It was more like you did the best you could and that was okay.

KRIS: So how did that start to extend outside of soccer off the pitch within school? You went to Sydney for university...?

ANN: I went to Perth, then I moved to Sydney. I think what it did was, again, it opened up my world in a way that I hadn't before. And it also allowed me to go after things that, you know, weren't considered traditional women's stuff. I grew up in a really traditional household. There were really traditional depictions of women and expectations of women. You know, African culture is really conservative. And because I grew up in all of that, I, I had very defined roles and very defined understandings of what women could do. And I feel like football like opened it up in a way of like, oh, I can do X and it's okay. Like, I can choose my own path. And I think for a really long time I was like, oh, you know, oh, well, [I'll] probably go to uni, do something like teaching or nursing. Not that there's anything wrong with that at all. But it was just like, those are the defined roles that you do as a woman. And I, for the first time, I kind of like just did what I wanted and I didn't care. And that was really liberating; frightening as hell, really frightening, but still also liberating. I can just do my own thing. And I think that's how it then translated into academics. It was like, okay, I'm just gonna do what I want. And what I wanted was law and what I wanted was journalism. And so then, you know, I had my own car to drive the siblings around, but then I utilized that car and used that freedom to then start match reporting and doing that and not really caring about whether it was the right thing to do, but I just loved it and I was going to do it.

KRIS: What was that frightening feeling?

ANN: That frightening feeling was, am I going to disappoint my family? Am I gonna disappoint my mum? Because she had given up so much to allow us to succeed or to give us the foundations to succeed, and I never wanted to disappoint her. So that frightening feeling was, am I doing the thing that's going to make her proud? Because I never wanted to do the thing that would make her cry. Like the world had made her cry in so many different ways. Not physically, but like, just metaphorically. The world had made her cry in so many different ways. And I never wanted to be the daughter that also added to that sorrow. So that was that frightening feeling of like, am I doing the right thing and how do I balance what I want with also how to not disappoint her?

KRIS: And so, as you started making decisions, did you find that the confidence just kept coming more and more?

ANN: Yeah, absolutely. But I think also, I was able to better articulate what I wanted to do. And I think finding that purpose really early on made decision-making so much easier. I remember I didn't define it, I guess, properly until I was in my thirties, but I feel like that it was still always like a really key part. I just wanted to be a good person and I wanted people to think I was a good person and I wanted people to think I was somebody who was helpful and I found that in football, when I saw that there was a gap in the gender inequity in the coverage and the gender inequity in treatment, it was like, well, okay, this is where I can do good. This is a space I can make a difference. There are other spaces, like, you know, I wanted to be a doctor and then I very quickly found out I really am bad with blood or anything like gory. So, okay, well that one's out. And then that's one of the reasons I chose law as well. And then sport was the other way. And very quickly I found that there was an opportunity to do good and to make change and I could do it in something that I actually really loved and I had an affinity for.

KRIS: So, on that note, let's talk about The Women's Game. How did the Women's Game start and what motivated you to start it?

ANN: The Women's Game started where... Honestly, it was one winters night, and I was researching for the World Football program, and I had just spent another frustrating couple of hours trying to find information on the state leagues around Australia. I was still struggling to find information about the Matildas to be able to... 'cause I'd just recently met Tom Samani and found out, hey, we have a women's national team and they're called the Matildas. I met Tom through Penny and Tom Samani is their head coach, and I wanted to cover them more on the World football program. I found it really hard even after the 2007 World Cup. I found it incredibly difficult to keep finding information on the team. And I just had this really old, I've still got it actually, white MacBook. And I know this is gonna sound a bit strange, but it was like at the time when, it was just like the early days of the internet really pushing out, and I think YouTube was only a couple of years on, but I jumped onto YouTube, I was like, how do you build a website? And then I found, Joomla, which was, I don't even know if it was still around, but it was very much like, it was very similar to WordPress. And I watched a couple of tutorials on YouTube and then I just was like, all right, I'm just gonna start building it. And it took me about a week and a half to build it. And then not long after, Football Australia or FFA announced that they were gonna have a women's league, and I was like, oh, great, okay, now I've actually got a really, like it's got a function, apart from more than the state leagues.

And then around that time also, we started to have Twitter and Facebook was starting to become bigger as well. So, from there I was just like, okay, great. And I just remember the first season of the W-League, I've still, oh my God, the first media guide, it's so bad, the media guide I created. I've still got it. I emailed all the media managers. It's funny because some of them are now my friends and some of them are still in the industry. Yeah, I remember just emailing all of them and just saying, hey, I just wanna do this. And that's how it started. I was still in uni. I was in my third year of law school, and I was working, I was doing two days a week at uni and then doing three days a week at Mallesons, Stephen Jakes, which is now King & Wood Malleson's. And so, I would kind of finish at five then go home, and I would write until like 8, 9, 10 o'clock at night. I would write the stories, I would organize the interviews to happen in my lunchtime. So, I would like sit there with like a tape recorder, with my laptop and just record the interviews. Or, I would spend lunchtime formulating the questions and emailing it off to the media managers. And then, you know, I'd get the answers back and I'd just sit and write. And then Mac had a, it's still got a program called Pages, and that's what I'd used to do the designing of the media guides. Yeah, and that's basically just how I did that for years and just did it over and over and over and over again, and met people and learnt more about the game and started to learn about the history of the game and the women involved...

KRIS: What is it about you or your skills that allowed you to just keep going through that time? Because there's passion and there's talent, but...

ANN: Then there's hard work. I mean, so many athletes say it, you know, you can have talent, but that's just one part of the equation. It's definitely my mum, like my mum has such an incredible work ethic, like phenomenal work ethic. And I also grew up in a family where education and learning was a really big part of growing up. We used to have, I don't know if you had them in Canada, but we used to have people who would like travel and sell you like Encyclopedia Britannica? And so, my parents bought a whole set, it's still in their house, like it's still in the house, because this was pre-computers. And so like, my parents bought a whole Encyclopedia Britannica and I used to remember, I used to just sit there and read and read and read, about all sorts of stuff.

And mum always says it as well, I've always just been a reader and had a thirst for learning and wanting to learn new things. And so, it just never occurred to me that I couldn't do something. I couldn't go and learn how to do something. And it was like, well, okay, if I can't do it this way, which is HTML and coding and all of that, okay, well I can't do it that way, but what's the other way I can try and find out how to do this? And I think that's, that's the first part. And then the next part is like, because of that whole concept of learning, I think my parents never, in particular my mum, never ascribed shame to us around asking for help. So, I never felt shame about saying, I don't know how to do something, can you teach me? It was always, it was almost a strength of like, yeah, I don't know how to do it, but if you show me, I will learn how to do it and I will also teach the next person how to do it. Yeah, and I feel like vulnerability actually helps in many ways. Vulnerability makes people feel better about themselves and they're more likely to teach you or to support you. Again, something I didn't know previously, but I ended up one day reading – the great Nelson Mandela quote about, you know, courage is not the absence of fear, or courage is feeling fear and doing it anyway. And that's kind of how I just kind of live it, I'm just gonna try it anyway.

KRIS: So, it's 15 years, this year, of the Women's Game. Congratulations. That's huge. What the women's game has produced and created even from a media perspective when there was nothing like it existing, are you happy with where it has gone?

ANN: Yes, but to be honest, Kris, I'm not so much happy with it as a website, I'm happy with what it has allowed to join the conversation. I'm happy with what it's facilitated. I'm really happy that there are so many people who started contributing to the women's game, came along to volunteer their time and helped increase the amount of coverage for women's football to the point where mainstream media couldn't ignore it anymore and they had to start covering. I'm happy that for a group of those people, now they're in mainstream jobs, like Sam Lewis and Leanna Baretti and Anna Harrington and Marissa Lou Danik, and you know, Angela Bachich. I'm happy that their time in the women's game now means they've got full-time jobs in the careers that they absolutely love and adore. I'm happy that it gave others a hobby that they really enjoy. It gives them, you know, time out from their lives in something that they feel bigger than part of, like Sheryl Downs, who now is editor of Beyond 90, or Lachey France, who is a statistician, or you know, Michael Aliesich who's a graphic designer. I'm happy that it's facilitated all of those experiences for people, that more than the nuts and bolts and the words and the photos and the imagery, that more than anything is what makes me feel so incredibly happy and so incredibly proud. And that there's a new generation coming through who were inspired by what the Women's Game did.

I always said about the Women's Game, was like, one day I don't want it to exist because it means other people are doing the job we wanted them to do. You know, the mainstream media *are* covering the game in the way we wanted it to, and it's okay that it doesn't exist. It's the same with my job, it's like, one day I don't want to be in my job because it means somebody else has taken it on and can do it much better than I do. Which means the women's, you know, the Matildas and the Young Matildas are in a better place because that person is providing much better service and coverage. I know where I am and I know what the game has given me and what I put back into the game and I'm totally confident if the next person that comes and does it better, I will cheer them all the way through. And so, it's really important to create that next generation's opportunity.

KRIS: Well, and you're doing that with the Women's World Cup Legacy programming. Can you tell us a bit about the program?

ANN: Yeah, our Game Women and Non-Binary Persons in Media program, that is around leveraging the Women's World Cup in the moment that we have to be able to create experiences and opportunities for the next generation of women and NB-persons in media. So, there are two streams. There's the comms and digital media stream, and then there's the photography stream. And each of them have five intakes of participants. And it's around giving them opportunities, giving them access to media events, giving them access to sporting events, helping them build their portfolio, connecting them with mentors, connecting them with industry experts so that they can hear their experiences. And just building a network of support so that they don't feel so alone. Because for a long time I did feel quite alone, you know, for a long time I sat in my bedroom and typed out those things and just kept doing it 'cause I was by myself. But eventually when I moved to Sydney and met more people who were doing the same thing I was, it felt less lonely. And secondly, it also meant I could do so much more because there were all of us pulling in the same direction. And so, I would like this generation not to have to try and find it by accident, but have a really strong program that helps them facilitate and develop that.

And the girls are doing amazing on the pitch, but it's also the infrastructure off the pitch that's also important. That's media, but that's also coaching, that's also refereeing. I mean, part of my role is to work really hard to also elevate the coaches because if you have more female coaches, it creates a

better environment for the women and girls who are coming through. And that's only positive. That's what's really important, is that it normalizes women in public life and women in public spaces, and we don't have to be apologetic about it. And I think that gives innate permission.

You know, I was really, really touched last night when I got a message from somebody who I kind of work alongside around the Matildas, and he messaged me and said, you know, his daughters were so excited to watch the Disney doco and see a black woman on their screens, involved in the game. And that's whether, you know, it is a woman of color or a female coach, a female referee, a female physio, doctor, a female team manager. You know, whatever that role is, when little girls see that, they go, oh, okay, yep, I can do this. I can actually do this. It was really touching.

KRIS: I'd love to talk about the Matildas because I guess as a fellow media person, you're definitely in a dream job, media person and someone who loves football, you're in a dream job. Can you take us back to the first year when you started and what it was like?

ANN: Yeah, it was actually a little bit by accident. I was working in football, Australia's digital content team and the 2020 Olympic qualifiers were happening, and I was working on Matilda's content and then the media manager at the time was unable to go into the camp because they were looking after another tournament, and they asked if I could take on the acting role. And I did. Again, absolutely terrified, had no idea, no idea. I have seen media managers for, you know, the last 10, 12 years, but actually knowing what the role is... no idea. But again, that whole idea of like, I'll just take it on. I literally Googled media managers' roles and responsibilities. I watched YouTube videos. I looked at media managers in other sports, I just did as much research as I could. And then I winged it. And I was also, that whole idea of being upfront, I was also upfront with the team manager. You know, I remember saying to Vito, like, I'm taking this role on, Vito, I'm gonna make mistakes, but I promise I'll only make that mistake once and I won't do it again. But, you know, I'm going to love this team and I'm just going to keep trying and working as hard as possible. So, I've always been really open and honest about, you know, my capability and just keep learning, keep growing.

Like I said, Vito, the team manager, he's just one of the most amazing people ever, made me feel so welcome. And I think I just pretty much stuck to him for the first camp. I was like, I'm just gonna stick to you. I'm just gonna sit near you. I'm just gonna do all that. And I think also the other part too was, I just watched, I didn't say a lot that first camp. I did my job, did my role, and then just watched. And I learned so much just by sitting and being quiet and watching what was going on around me.

KRIS: We see them play or we might see them through their social media, but what is it like for you to be there with them, basically, observing and being part of their personal lives? I would imagine there's a lot of friendship building.

ANN: Like, I mean, I'm really lucky a lot of these players, I've known them since they were young, since they were, you know, 14 and went into the Junior Matildas the first time. I think it's two things. It's being caring and also being respectful. So, the relationships I have with players are the relationships they allow me to have. Everybody is different. Everybody has a different cadence and just being there in the role and the space and the way that people need you, but also understanding that football is just one small part of their lives. It's just one part of their existence and it's one part of who they are. And so many of them are fun and quirky and you know... and then there are other times where it's incredibly physically demanding and they're tired and they're, you know, irritable and you never take that personally because that's being human. And I think it also helps that, yeah, like having known so many of them for so long,

they're humans to me. And that's the one thing I always try and remind the public is they're footballers for those 90 minutes, and they're humans for the rest of their existence, and we just need to keep remembering that.

KRIS: Yeah. And you and I talked about this in an earlier conversation, you know, is through media and through reporting, that there could be more of a focus on players as people? Especially moving through Covid the last couple of years and all the, you know, societal things that are coming up in terms of wellbeing, that we could relate as people and learn from each other.

ANN: Could you imagine if every time you had to do your job, 20 or 30,000 people were watching you, and then after would critique how you did your job? I mean, that's sometimes how you need to think about it. And then in those moments, thinking about it, how would you react to that? And then how do you then do it with kindness? So, I think it's that idea of just remembering this is someone's daughter, this is someone's sister, nowadays, this is somebody's mother. And how would it be if it was turned onto you? And so, I think as much as possible, we try and humanize them so that the public can humanize them as well.

KRIS: And what about you as a person? What would you say this role with the Matildas has given you in your life?

ANN: Oh, wow. Everything. It's given me a sense of purpose. It's given me an understanding of who I am in situations of high pressure, in situations of low pressure. It's given me some lifelong friends, but it's also kept me separate in many ways. It can be a bit lonely. You're traveling a lot and sometimes I'll come home and things have changed around my family or my siblings or people have had experiences that I've not been a part of because I've been away for so long. So, it's given all of those pieces. But I guess it's also given the opportunity to live history. I think it's really rare that you get to be in historic moments and be involved and part of historic moments. And that is something that I just don't take for granted. Even like, you know, that feeling of saying I was there, or that feeling of being able to sit down, sit back and go, yep, I helped make that happen. That's a really intoxicating feeling. And I think my key thing is I work really hard to just remember the mission all the time and being true to that mission and keeping to those tenants. So, I think I try and stay as much as possible out of all of the, you know, the celebrity culture that the world has inhabited and just keep reminding [myself] what is the mission, what is that end goal?

And knowing your why is fundamental. I always say it to the younger Junior Matildas, young Matildas cohort, you know, decision-making is really, really easy when you know your why, because you stay within those things. Does it meet that? No – then don't do it. It's really simple. But getting to that stage when you know your why, that's the hard part. That's the soul-searching. That's being truly and utterly honest with yourself, getting true and utter honesty from your family and friends. And that's soul-stripping work. And you've gotta be okay to be able to handle that, but utilize that feedback and find your why. And then honestly, every single decision is so much easier after that.

KRIS: As we look ahead to the Women's World Cup, and you would've been working on it for years, how's this moment in time feeling for you, given your whole journey in the game?

ANN: It feels surreal. It feels incredibly surreal. I think I always knew the Women's Game would get to this stage. I just didn't know how long it would take. I honestly thought I might be in my sixties before we get here. And that was always gonna be okay, 'cause it was like, it's the long haul, it's the long game. So, to have it all happening right now and so quickly, it's surreal, but it's also, it's like being in a kaleidoscope where everything keeps shifting before you really can see what the picture in front of you looks like. And I've actually made the conscious decision of not making big decisions right now because it's shifting so fast and so quickly that you are making a decision based on where things were five minutes ago. And so at the moment I'm just decided to sit in it, to sit in the moment to do the things, but not to make big decisions because it's gonna take a little while until we turn that kaleidoscope properly and we can see the picture that's gonna be in front of us for the next little while.

KRIS: What do you think the women's game needs more of?

ANN: I think the women's game needs more selflessness. I think one of the things that has always frustrated me is that we haven't pulled together in the same direction. Because of those different motivations, you often come up against people who won't make a decision for the greater good. And that's what I mean by a decision is unpopular. And you might not be liked, but it's a decision that's actually the best thing for the game. And I sometimes found that in Western Australia, things were so ingrained, and people had done things the same way for decades, that they didn't wanna change to be able to do something that would actually make it better for the game in the future. And it might cause them some short-term pain. And that's why I feel like women's football, it needs more selflessness and people saying, yeah, that's not gonna be popular for me right now, but what that will do for the game in 10 years' time that's gonna make it worth it, even though I'm not gonna have that instant gratification. So that's what I'd like to see more. And therefore, we make decisions that are about increasing participation, about making the game more accessible to women and girls in coaching and in in administration. And you know what, that's gonna mean is some men are not going to be as involved in the game. And again, that's where the selflessness needs to come into, of that's okay because it's gonna open up the game in a completely new and totally different way.

Like there are lots of things that I could do in my role and just do it myself, or I could say yes to that opportunity and give it to myself. Like that's the reality. I'm in a role where I'm a gatekeeper in a lot of ways and I can gate keep people out, but what's that gonna do? Who's that gonna help apart from me? But what does that do? So I think it's those opportunities where, you know, there's a paid coaching course that you could go on, but you know what, there's a female coach who's working in the under elevens or the under twelves and you know that if she got that position in that free paid coaching course, it means that she can coach those two teams or move up a grade or whatever it is. And then you give her that opportunity. I think it's those spaces where we could feed ourselves, but like, let's actually feed others because it's gonna have a much greater impact in the future. Once you've reached that area, make sure you drop down the ladder so others can climb up with you.

KRIS: What is your advice for younger girls, or even women that could be in their thirties or forties coming into the game now, and are thinking about playing for the first time?

ANN: My advice is – be okay with failure because failure is where you learn the most. Failure is where you learn most about yourself. You learn most about what you need to do next. Failure inherently is not a bad thing. And it doesn't make you lesser than. I failed multiple times. I failed spectacularly multiple times, but it's like, okay, well what did I learn from it? And got from that? So, don't have a sense of

shame about it. It's like, I did it, sorry, it didn't work. All right, next time I'm gonna, I need to do X, Y, Z. So that's my thing, do the thing that scares you even if you're gonna fail.

You've seen it, how many times do male coaches get appointed to jobs? Like Steve Bruce has just been appointed to another job; like how many teams have gone down under him or have like been relegated or he's been fired, or he's been sacked from that role, and yet he's still got another coaching job. And like, I was just looking, you know, Steve Bruce - 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 13 clubs, he's managed. So, there is a culture where we allow men to fail, and we still give them another opportunity. But when a woman fails, that's the only chance she gets until she can prove herself again by starting at the bottom and working all the way up. So, I wanna have changed that culture of like, if somebody "fails", in quotation marks, how do we give them another opportunity to actually show and demonstrate that they've learned from that piece.

I think it's also really important to have a good support system around you. One of my best friends I met through football, but oftentimes I will ask him, I'll be like, Joe, I need you to be honest. What do you think about X? And he is really honest with me, and I don't take that as a criticism. I don't take that as an attack. I don't take that as anything, but he wants me to grow and he wants me to be successful. So, I think having a really strong support system around you, who can actually be really honest with you as well. And again, this is something I also try and say to people, is take yourself out of the equation. Think of yourself as hovering over yourself and what you've done and then assess it from that way. When you're evaluating, don't use the you, the I, all of those kind of possessive words. You look at it in terms of the third person and the task, and that means you can get more out of it because you're not associating your self-worth to the activity that you just performed.

Again, this is the whole idea of like, what's your core tenant? My core tenant is be a good person. So, if I stuff up a task, that task doesn't stop me from being a good person. So why am I going to, like, castigate myself over it. Now, if I did something that went against being a good person, that's a different conversation. That's a harder conversation to have of why did I make that decision when I know that's not who I am.

KRIS: In an earlier conversation you mentioned that your brothers grew up recognizing the value of women as, you know, strong and independent. What does it mean to be a woman today? So, I'm wondering if you can just share your thoughts on that with us.

ANN: I think to be a woman today means to travel through a world where you are judged and you are scrutinized and you are given messages of what is right and what is wrong consistently. And today's women find a way beyond that. I think that's what I've noticed is that the strongest women I know, they get whispered about, but they just keep doing it anyway because ultimately, they wanna make their part of the world, what they can influence, better. Allowing and giving yourself permission to succeed and to be unapologetic about it. And it's not arrogance and it's not cockiness, it's none of that. It's about understanding your self-worth and being okay with succeeding.

Find your people, male or female, or non-binary, find your people and take strength from them. It's a symbiotic relationship with them. They're gonna be the ones who take you through the hard times and bring you down to earth if you're starting to be a little bit cocky. I think it's really incredibly important to find your people who will be your support network. And be a good person.

KRIS: Mm-Hmm. Thank you so much, Ann.

ANN: No worries, Kris.

OUTRO: *Thank you for listening. This podcast was produced by the Centre for Stories. It was developed in conjunction with and funded by the State Library of Western Australia. Our organisations believe in storytelling as a way to build more inclusive communities. Head to slwa.wa.gov.au to listen to the rest of this oral history collection, or to centreforstories.com to learn more about our storytelling services. Special thanks to our production team, script editor and executive producer Luisa Mitchell, producer and interviewer Kris Marano, and audio engineer Mason Vellios.*