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Transcript of an interview with
Tash Rigby

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STATE LIBRARY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA - ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

DATE OF INTERVIEW: 2023

INTERVIEWER: Kris Marano

TRANSCRIBER: Centre for Stories

DURATION: 40 min., 28 sec.

REFERENCE NUMBER: OH4742/7

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TASH RIGBY INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT – GAME CHANGERS 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 the 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 today's episode, Kris talks to Captain of the Perth Glory Women's League, Tash Rigby, who replaced former captain Sam Kerr in 2019. Enjoy.

KRIS: What's your earliest memory of kicking a soccer ball?

TASH: My earliest memory would be mum taking me down to the local soccer club, Margaret River Football Club. And she convinced me to go down because we were doing a lot of sport at the time because I had a lot of energy, and we were doing a lot of surfing in the summer, but then in the winter it was a bit cold and the waves were a bit too big back then, when I was, how old was I? 10 years old. A lot of other players that I speak to start really early, like as young as four. So in like the grand scheme, it is a bit later than a lot of people generally start.

And so one of my really close friends was going down to play. There wasn't a girls' team at the time, it was an all-boys team, under-tens, and we went down and as soon as I started playing, I absolutely fell in love with the game. It was an amazing team, and I had an amazing coach and that would definitely be my first memory. Being a girl in an all-boys team has challenges. Like you don't feel like you might fit in as much as you would playing in an all-girls team. But I was really lucky because I did have one other girl with me. She was my best mate, and we had an amazing coach. I think that was really key in us finding enjoyment in it because he was so inclusive and supportive, and he didn't treat us any differently, so it never felt like we were out of place.

Being so young and playing with boys at that age you really just have to keep up and we didn't really think differently at the time, but the speed of the ball movement, the boys *are* very fast, and they are really physical. So, starting at that level from a young age really helped me to develop in terms of on

field, and then off-field, I guess, like I said, not being treated any differently was really important to me because I didn't experience that discrimination from a young age. So, it helped me to find a lot of confidence in myself as well. And I took that with me moving forward. And then, when I did move into an all-girls team at the age of 15, I think it was, I had a lot of confidence in myself as a player and as a person as well, which was really good.

KRIS: And what was it like for your mum and dad and you said you have a brother as well, what was it like for them watching you like fall in love with the game, with soccer?

TASH: Yeah, it was really, really nice. I think both mum and dad, they didn't come from a soccer background at all. So, dad grew up playing rugby and mum is cricket obsessed, so they definitely love their sport. So, I'm not actually sure why they did choose soccer, but they chose soccer for both myself, and my brother Reece, and Reece played as well. I think he started when he was six, so he was an amazing player back in the day too. He played in midfield, and he was incredible. He didn't pursue it like I did in the end. But yeah, I think it was really nice for us to find that community within the Margaret River Football club because they did have a really amazing community. The experience of going down and playing early mornings on a Sunday and all the parents are there and all the oranges at halftime. I don't know, just I have really distinct memories of those moments in my life, and I think it helped us to come together as a family as well.

KRIS: Oranges are such a ritual aren't they?

TASH: Yeah they are.

KRIS: Such a good childhood memory of soccer.

TASH: Yeah. And like lolly snakes at the end, did you just like look forward to that snake?

KRIS: Still, with all the women. Pass the snake around.

TASH: Yeah, literally!

KRIS: So you were 15, I would assume at that point you were getting more serious in terms of playing competitively. Who were your support networks?

TASH: Back then growing up, the only female role models that I can remember distinctly are Cathy Freeman, who absolutely rocked the nation. She is just such an incredible icon and I just remember her so distinctly. And Layne Beachley. I think that's from growing up in Margaret River being surrounded by surfing culture and her really being at the forefront of women's surfing back then. She was just such a trailblazer and everything she did, she did so unapologetically, and she was so fierce in that realm. So those two really stand out to me. There isn't and there wasn't, sorry, the visibility that there was around women's football back then, as there is now.

My support network back then was definitely my family. My mum was, was my biggest advocate for sure. And she played a massive part in motivating me and driving me forward. And I wouldn't have been able to do the things that I did and meet the requirements that I had to come into Perth without her or

dad driving me to Perth three times a week from Margs, which was about three hours both ways. So, it's funny, because back then you just took like I just took it for granted. Like I definitely was so appreciative of what they did, but I would not be where I am right now if they hadn't done that from a young age. So, I feel really grateful for their dedication. And also, mum, back then I thought she was like nagging me all the time, but now I'm like wow, she really was pushing me to be the best that I could be without me realizing it. So, I'm really grateful for that.

When I was 15 is when I first qualified for my first state team. So, I experienced like semi-professional elite football for the first time then. The way that I was able to get selected for that team is we played in something called Country Week, which is where all the rural and remote communities came to Perth and played in a big competition. From there, there was an identification system where you got identified as talent and then you went to country camp, which is where all the identified kids went and played. And from there you got selected if you're good enough to play in the state team. So even being at country camp for me was huge.

At the time it meant going over to Sydney to play in a national tournament in Coffs Harbour. So, I did that from the age of 15 to 17. And that was my first look into what it took to be an elite footballer. It's weird because I'm not a shy person, but I was quite shy because the girls that I was playing with had been in a development pathway since a very young age. So, they'd been in the system for a long time and they were amazing players, so they were where I wanted to be. So, I definitely... they were kind of like my role models even though that we were the same age, they'd been exposed to a level of training that I'd never experienced before, living in a rural area. So, it was quite intimidating and daunting. And that's when I first met Sam Kerr as well because we were the same age and she was in and out of that same system as well. And I remember playing against her and I remember she played in my number, and I was like oh, she's obviously got it! And I just remember that being my first experience of players of that calibre. So yeah, it was, it was really great being involved at that age and then getting an idea of what was necessary.

KRIS: So what did it take to be an elite footballer?

TASH: After the state competitions, nothing really came out of it for me after that. I went back home and then I took a gap year. So, I played at local, in the local league in rural WA while I took a gap year after I finished year 12, because mum was always massive on me finishing year 12 and then going to uni. Because back then it wasn't even a viable, it wasn't even considered that you could play, I could play at this level, because I didn't even know about Perth Glory Women until I started playing in the state league in Perth. So that wasn't really an option. It was more, I've got to get to uni and start my degree. And as I did that, I joined the UWA team and I just played in the state league, so the Australian League and loved it. But for me then it was all about my love for football. That was why I played because I absolutely loved it. It was so much fun, and I just loved the sense of community that sport brings and that's the way that I could access that. Especially moving from Margaret River to Perth. It was nice to have like an already-made community that I could step into. And then people started commenting saying like, oh, you're performing quite well. And I remember one coach saying to me, you could make the Perth Glory team. And I remember literally being like, that's so foreign to me. Like it was an amazing compliment, but I was like, no way. No way. And so, then I was asked to go and play for Queens Park at the time, which was a team that was performing really well in the league, and it was, I was like, wow, that's awesome that they've asked me. So, I went there and that's when I first started being coached by Ben who had an amazing influence in my life because he was probably the first coach that really

believed that I could go further. And his belief in me kind of like almost tricked me to believing in myself and like giving me the confidence to believe that I could maybe be a part of the Perth Glory team. He put my name forward, after a few years playing there and being developed by him, to play in a pre-season match against Glory. Which was wild to me, and I was so excited. It was like an all-star state team. So, I got selected for that, which was awesome. I started on the bench and then in the second half I went on as a right-back, which is where I play in my position. And I did quite well, and we won against glory, which was huge.

KRIS: How did you feel when you stepped on the pitch? You went from the bench, you got on a halftime, how did you feel?

TASH: I ended up going on halfway through the first half because one of the players got injured and the coach at the time of the state team turned around and said to me, said to the bench, who wants to go on as a midfielder? Like number six, which is midfield. And I had never played midfield in my life, but I saw a green light and I was like, I'm gonna take it. And I was like, yep, me. And so I went on and I had no idea what I was doing in midfield but I managed to set up a goal, which was crazy. And so then in the second half they shifted things around and I got put into right-back where I did quite well and I felt like, when I stepped on I was just like, I just gotta go for it, you know, like I've just gotta take this opportunity. And then we won and it was like so much elation and it was awesome 'cause it was a really big crowd and it was the first experience for me where I was like, wow, that was a really great quality and intensity. And then after that I had the assistant coach of Glory call me and ask me to come down for a trial. That was crazy to me. I was like beyond excited and I went down and that's when there are some very good players playing in their team at the time, a few Matilda's and Sam Kerr was captain, and as I walked in the first date of trial I saw them all and I was just like, oh my gosh, I just was blown away. And then after two weeks of trialing I ended up getting in. So that was, it was a very interesting path, but yeah, it's like eight years later now, which is mad.

KRIS: How were the girls, the players who were there, Sam Kerr and the others and the Matilda's, how were they with you coming in?

TASH: The way that Sam treated me when I walked in. It had been like seven years since we'd first met, and we hadn't seen each other since. And she'd just come back from the Olympics I think at the time or maybe a World Cup. Anyway, she'd come back from a massive competition, and I walked in the door, and she looked at me and she was like, back then when I was 15, she used to call me blue eyes because I had bright blue eyes and she just like jumped up and was like, blue eyes! Like wrapped her arm around me and like gave me a big cuddle. And I was like, what? Like she didn't have to do that. And it just made me feel like so seen and like safe and even though I was still incredibly nervous, I was so thankful because obviously she has a big influence in the team and it was really great for me to be able to be like, okay, I feel like not as scared as I did before. So her humility and her warmth was amazing. And then, yeah, the rest of the girls, I don't really remember much. It was always like such a blur. They were all great. It was very competitive. I just remember it being incredibly competitive and very intense and I trained five days a week for two weeks, which was to me I'd never done before. So, it was like really exhausting as well. But it was such a good taster.

KRIS: At what point did you become captain? And do you feel like that first interaction with Sam Kerr and how she embraced you influenced how you lead?

TASH: I think the fourth year of me playing, I was appointed captain and it was when Sam left. So, Sam left and then I was given the captaincy, which was crazy, because I still was building into the game myself and I am always learning who I am as a player and as a person and my role in the team. So, I definitely felt not as prepared as I would've liked, but that happens a lot in life. And so, definitely, I feel like Sam's humility and the way that she is so down to earth and treats everyone equally and with kindness really shaped the way that I like to lead today as well. It took me a while to realise that I didn't have to fit a certain mold, because as a leader and as a captain, everyone has a different view on what that looks like. And I needed to kind of identify what me as a captain looked like. And for me that was identifying my strengths and they are, now I know that's like my approachability and my empathy and like my kindness. And so, it took me a couple of seasons to be like, okay, these are my strengths and I want to lead through my strengths. And then identifying others' strengths and letting them lead through that. Because being a leader isn't leading on your own, it's empowering those around you. So, identifying those and then empowering those women to lead in their own different way. And my vice-captain is almost the opposite of me in terms of our strengths. Kim Carroll, she has been such a pioneer for the women's game. She's had 50 caps as a Matilda, over 50 caps as a Matilda, over 150 appearances in the A-league. She's a veteran. She's led from the front since the very beginning and paved the way for us today really. And her technical and tactical knowledge of the game is so diverse and she's so experienced in that area. And she's also very good at dealing with conflict, which is something that I'm not. So, it's amazing. I'm so lucky to be able to have someone that I can talk to and that can kind of lead by example and mentor me in that area.

And our younger girls in the team, we have another girl, Morgan, who's one of our keepers. She's so good at bringing people together. So, identifying that. Then when people are given the space to lead through their strengths, it's almost like positive reinforcement because you then are like, oh this is working, and other people trust me to do that. This, it builds your confidence. Practice makes perfect right? I feel like that kind of influences your confidence on a whole and it can then spill up onto the field, off the field, whatever it is. So, I do agree. I find like this, I feel like our younger players particularly, it's more often than not, that they are not confident in speaking or leading without someone helping them. And I think it's such an important piece for senior players to be able to open up space and create safe environments so that people feel like they can be themselves. Because that's another thing, if you don't feel safe, it's hard for you to even reach the best you can be. And that safety to fail as well. Like an environment to feel safe to make mistakes without being torn down. I think that's a big one as well. We had a few conversations about that this season because it's an elite environment, you also need to balance that with an environment that encourages making mistakes as well because that's the only way we're gonna learn. So, it's interesting trying to find that balance.

KRIS: Can you tell me about anything that's been particularly challenging through your, you said seven years, with Glory?

TASH: Yeah. The big one that comes to mind, and we've spoken about it before, is the fact that for a long time, and still as a female athlete, we have to balance our full-time professional career or work life with our pretty much full-time footballing career. So, for six years I worked full-time, so eight hours a day and then trained three to four hours sometimes a day as well. So, the toll that that kind of took on me in terms of my mental health and in terms of my balance and self-care ended up becoming too much. And that's why now I've decided to take a step back from my full-time professional career and focus not just on football, because I am still working, but in a casual part-time capacity. And even though it has meant a significant financial hit for me, I've kind of come to the point where I understand that this

is a very short window for me in terms of being able to play professionally. And that means more to me than money at the moment. So, as a man, I wouldn't have to be making this sacrifice, but it's worth it for me. And I'm lucky that I am in a position now where I can afford to do it – just. But I have had six years of being able to save and also, I've set myself up to be in a position where I am able to do that. So yeah, I think that would definitely be the biggest challenge.

KRIS: How did you work through those challenging times?

TASH: I think leaning on my support networks has been the biggest thing because often when you are going through something like that, it is hard to find time as well to stay social. Because I was finding that was such a big hit for me. Like, because I was working and then training, being social and that's such an important part of who I am as well. Cause I am like a bit of a social butterfly! I'm like, I love, I get a lot from my relationships and connection as well. So not having that took a big toll on me. So having the right people around me that understood what I was going through and still were really patient with me and still gave me the time that I needed at those times, was amazing for me.

I guess reflection is a big one for me too. So, reflecting on what's important to me, what my goals are and what I need to sacrifice and understanding what it takes has been really important for me too. And also, my psychologist would actually be the biggest one. So, my work with my psychologist, I wouldn't have been able to get through and navigate the challenges without him. So yeah, I cannot speak more highly about the work that I've done in that area. Sometimes it's about sport. A lot of the times it isn't. A lot of the times it's about relationships, about trauma, like my past, about trauma, about challenges in and out of sport. And I just find that, yes, getting it off your chest and out of your head is massive. And also, understanding for me the root cause of why things are the way they are, because then it gives you almost a sense of, not inner peace, but like an understanding as to why instead of going around in circles, it almost gives you an answer. And it's not sudden, it takes a lot of work and a lot of unpacking and a lot of reflecting and going back and learning and growing. But it has only helped me to move forward and grow as a person.

KRIS: Yeah. And then I would imagine that would extend to your leadership with the team and how you give whatever you are learning back to other people.

TASH: Definitely. And like recently we've been doing a lot of role modeling, not role modeling, a lot of roleplaying, which has really helped me in certain conversations or how I do navigate challenges as a leader. It just helps me to be more self-aware, which I think is the be a really important thing as a person and as an athlete. The more self-aware you can be, the more you can grow on the field and off the field and when you do make decisions and being able to reflect on whether it is the right or the wrong one. And that's okay if it is the wrong one, it's just learning from that. But yeah, definitely.

KRIS: And I wanna talk about Ange Stannett, your partner and your fiancé, for a minute.

TASH: For a hot minute!

KRIS: Just the two of you have such positive energy and I would say are role models for other people in terms of how you extend that support, like, you know, Ange is on the sidelines at your games or always pumping you up or showing how proud she is on social media.

TASH: A lot of people aren't in relationships with other elite athletes who can sympathise, empathise with exactly what you're going through. And it's so beneficial to have someone that does understand that and has patience when, I don't know, you are giving everything to your sport. Like particularly this last season, Ange absolutely carried us, carried our relationship through, because it was a difficult season for myself. I love watching her play and I love watching her navigate through her season. And she's vice-captain as well, so she is in a leadership position too, so I'm constantly learning from her and how she deals with certain challenges and it's so nice to be able to bounce off one another when we do have those conversations. So yeah, it's so amazingly special.

KRIS: In terms of both of you being women in sport and influential women in sport, where do you think with the Women's World Cup coming, what do you think the game needs more of?

TASH: I think it needs more of a lot in Australia. I think it needs more, especially heading into this World Cup, more promotion, I think. It needs even more marketing and promotion at all levels. At the national level, on the world stage, at the A-League's level. And then even more so at like a state level, even grassroots. I think promotion is a big one. And I also think just investment in general.

Constantly we're starting to see people believe in women's football and invest because the, it does need investment in the end. It needs people to believe in it, it needs that faith, and then it will only grow from there. So, I also believe that it needs to be more accessible at like a grassroots level as well, like female friendly facilities. And we need more women in leadership positions as we always talk about it, Gaining Ground, like empowering women to step into leadership positions so that we can, going back to visibility, see female coaches, see female referees, and not only at that level, but in decision making roles as well. So as presidents, as CEOs, so that we have a voice at that level. So, we feel represented because at the moment I don't think we have that high percentage of gender equality that we need in decision making roles so that we do feel represented.

It almost comes back to confidence again. Like women need to feel confident to step into those roles and they need to feel empowered and they need the tools to do so. They also need champions. I feel like the confidence to even go for a job at that level at the moment, we're always, and we speak a lot about imposter syndrome, where you don't feel ready, but if you have a few people in your corner cheerleading you on, stepping into those roles.

What we're hoping to see from, well, what I'm hoping to see from this World Cup is, all of these eyes are gonna be on this amazing game and these amazing women and hopefully, post-World Cup, we see the influence and the impact that these women have on the community and we can see an increase in investment. So, there's more sponsorship for not only the top, because if there's more sponsorship at the top, there's more visibility, which means younger girls and boys want to aspire to be that, because it is more visible. Being in the midst of football and being the main target market, I personally don't think I'm seeing enough marketing and promotion for the World Cup. And I *am* the target market, so I don't know how someone who's completely removed from football, what they're seeing. Because of Ange obviously I'm always constantly comparing to AFLW and we see AFLW everywhere. I'm a woman in sport, so I am the target market to an extent, but you see it on billboards, you see it on channel 7, channel 9, channel 10, constantly. We see it in like everyday advertising and they have the money, AFL have invested in AFLW, they do have more money and it is one of the leading sports in Australia. You see the level of promotion and marketing and how quickly how AFLW has been able to expand at a

grassroots level for them, and at the top. There's been just an exponential growth in every aspect. So, I think to kind of reach that level, we need more visibility, like I'm saying. We need more mainstream advertising and more chat in general because it's not where it needs to be, or it comparatively, against other sports, isn't really there.

KRIS: Is it sort of the idea in order to bring everyone around the game, boys, girls, anyone who just appreciates sport, we need to be promoting it more broadly in the community?

TASH: 100%.

KRIS: Yeah. I've heard a couple of people say that there are many people who don't know that the Women's World Cup is happening. Just simply because they're not seeing anything up on a billboard or...

TASH: Right. I see it because I am in the midst of it, but otherwise I'm like – Sam Kerr is one of the biggest footballers in the world. She should be everywhere in Perth. She should be plastered across buildings like, Women's World Cup, like, I don't know why we're not utilizing that more? We need to use our assets and she's one of our biggest assets. So, to me, I would like to just see more of it in mainstream society.

KRIS: When you look back on your whole journey that we've talked about, what do you know now that you wish you would've known when you were 15-year-old Tash starting out?

TASH: When I was growing up and I was going through, I never knew that this would be an opportunity. I didn't really push myself like I would've liked. Because I think if I'd known I could, this is the goal that I could potentially reach... I was a really dedicated kid and I loved to train, and I trained for the fun of it. But if I'd known... It's kind of like a catch-22 though, because if, maybe if I'd trained hard and pushed myself so much, maybe I would've burnt out? I just think if I'd been able to say like, this is where you're going, take every opportunity you can. Because I know there were a few moments where I picked like other things over football, where now, if I'd looked back, I definitely would've changed that and I would've dedicated myself purely to football. But I got here anyway. Maybe I would have been in the national team by now. I guess I have that in the back of my mind. I would tell myself that, and I'm always to this day telling myself that attitude is everything. Like I think for me, the way that you approach an opportunity can determine the outcome to an extent. Because if I give everything to an opportunity and I do it in a way that makes me proud of how I've conducted myself as well and how I've treated others, then even if it doesn't come off, I still feel grateful and proud regardless of whether I've achieved the outcome.

KRIS: What's some advice that stayed with you throughout this time that continues to influence you?

TASH: I think on the field, definitely something that, a quote that I've read, and I think Sam said it back in the day, is 'hard work beats talent, if talent doesn't work hard'. Yeah. So, for me, that was a big one because I have seen incredibly talented players in the past not make the squad or not be selected because they are relying on that as opposed to working their socks off. For me, I would consider myself a less technical player and I try and try to be more technical, but I know that one thing I can always rely on is I will be, trying to be the hardest worker on the team in training, playing, off field, as much as I possibly can. So yeah, that's something, and I think Sam was like a perfect example of that. Like, after

every session she'll be doing extra running, she'll be in the gym longer than anyone else, you know, like that, those one-percenters and that those extras that you always hear are the best of the best? Like LeBron James, Kobe Bryant, the goats of the games, they're shooting hours and hours after. So, I think, yeah, that's something that really stood out to me.

I think believing in yourself is such a big thing and that that isn't always innate. And if it isn't, learning to listen to those around you that are positive voices, and picking your inner circle carefully because it's so important to have. Sometimes you will be confident and believe in yourself, and other days you won't. And when you don't, you can rely on those around you to lift you up and push you forward. And just treating others like you want to be treated, it's like so simple. My favorite quote ever by Maya Angelou is 'people will forget what you did. People will forget what you said, but they'll never forget how you made them feel.' And I think that's so... I try to use that in both life and in sport.

KRIS: What does it mean to you to be a woman today?

TASH: Whoa, that's a huge question. I feel so lucky to be involved in women's sport and to be a woman in sport right now because I really feel like there's a lot of change. And I feel like for a long time prior to this, it was a slow and gradual creep, or even plateau. And even in the last 10 years for me, like saying when I was growing up, I didn't have any visible female role models to now where everywhere I look, and because of accessibility, social media and technology, the world that we live in now, us being able to put these incredible women on pedestals. It's amazing to see it changing and the momentum starting to build and shift. And I feel so grateful to be able to play a part in that. And remembering that when we put on the jersey, we're putting on the jersey that these all these women have worn and we are carrying them with us. And like we stand on the shoulders of the women that came before us. I love that quote. Being proud of that and being able to contribute what we're now contributing for the women and girls to come in the future, I feel like it's a real pivotal and critical moment. So, we are still not where we want to be, but we have to keep asking questions, pushing boundaries, and fighting for more and not just settling. So yeah, it's a really amazing thing to be a part of this movement and to be a part of this time. Me heading towards the end of my career now, I can't think about, I'm so excited to think about where the game is gonna be in 10 years. I think I'm just proud of the legacy that I'm leaving and I'm proud of my contribution to the game and how I've, like I said, continued to ask questions and continue to push the boundaries and fight for what I really believe we deserve in. And yeah, I'm proud of how I've grown into the leader that I've become. And I'm proud of being a part of the very first Pride round that we had this year because that was a really special moment for me personally, for the team and to be a part of a club whose values aligned with mine.

KRIS: That was a beautiful day.

TASH: Yeah. It was, hey? It was just a really good feel, wasn't it? It was just like people that were there, were there because they shared in a common belief and they supported us and it was like love was being prioritised overall, which was just like so magic. And that's the power of what sport can do, I guess. Mm.

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.