

OFFICE OF SPORT

COLLECTIVE VOICES



HER
SPORT
HER WAY





Chief Executive, Karen Jones, striking the #EachforEqual pose

MESSAGE FROM KAREN JONES

This International Women's Day is a very special one for me as it's my first as Chief Executive of the Office of Sport. According to the Global Gender Gap Report, there is still a long way to go to achieve worldwide gender parity, so I am very proud to represent women at a leadership level and be able to help influence change in the workplace, the sport and active recreation sector, and across government.

It may seem difficult for just one individual to make a difference on their own, but collectively there are millions of us whose actions and behaviours each day, no matter how small, can have a meaningful impact on the cause for gender equality – and that's powerful.

The push for gender equality does not end on International Women's Day. Every day we must challenge stereotypes, fight bias, broaden perceptions, improve situations and celebrate women's success. The rise of women's professional sports is perhaps one of the greatest opportunities to redefine femininity and equality through powerful role models with diverse portrayals of what being a girl or woman is.

Females continue to be under-represented in participation and in leadership roles across all levels of sport. In addition, salaries, prize money, media coverage and access to facilities and resources is inequitable. Now is the time to leverage the rise of elite female athletes and drive change

for girls and women across all roles and levels in women's sport.

The Office of Sport's Her Sport Her Way strategy, affirms the NSW Government's commitment to empower women and girls to have full access to opportunity and choice, be valued for their diversity, be recognised for their contribution, and be able to participate. Her Sport Her Way provides a clear role for government to work with the sector and new partners in innovative ways to shape the future of sport for women and girls in NSW.

This online book celebrates the collective voices of women's sport throughout 2020. Featuring four themes: Design Shapers, Dream Makers, Ceiling Smashers and Game Changers, we showcase the collective contribution to the women's sport landscape and the initiatives we are undertaking to bring the Her Sport Her Way strategy to life.

These stories highlight the positive impact that can be

had from just a single person's thought, idea or vision. Collectively, each one of us can help accelerate gender equality. Let's continue to work together to create a healthier, more balanced, future-ready world. Let's all be #EachforEqual.

I hope you find these stories as inspiring as I do.

Thanks for reading and until next time.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Karen Jones'.

Karen Jones

Chief Executive

EMPOWERING DADS TO EMPOWER THEIR GIRLS

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Nick has raved to his friends about the program: *I'd encourage as many people as possible to do the program. I couldn't speak more highly of it, and all credit to Prof Morgan for pulling it together.*

When internationally renowned men's health expert, Prof Phil Morgan, had his third daughter he was struck by comments people made, ranging from: "You're going to have to lock your daughters up!" to: "Good luck at the ballet!" and: "Bad luck for not having a son."

As the comments sunk in, he wondered why people felt having a daughter meant less opportunities than having a son. Especially when it came to sport. As an academic, he started looking at the research which showed girls are dropping out of sport at a rate six times greater than boys. He found, quite alarmingly, that by the time NSW girls leave primary school, they are well behind boys in the acquisition of key fundamental movement skills.

The drivers of this disparity, he found, are that girls get less encouragement and opportunities than boys, compounded with self-esteem and body image issues. Fathers are also less likely to be involved with their daughters in co-physical activity than their sons and hard to engage in parenting programs.

"Girls are constantly bombarded with pervasive cultural messages that value them more for how they look than who they are," he says. "So how can we help fathers remove the gender straight jacket that rewards girls for their looks and passivity, and focus on their physical confidence and their competence and their passions and insights?"

It was these questions and insights that drove Phil to create the award-winning Daughters and Dads program. It's the world's first program targeting fathers and daughters with the aim of educating and empowering them to improve girls' physical activity, sports proficiency and social-emotional wellbeing.

Such is the success of this program that the NSW Government under the Her Sport Her Way strategy is partnering with the University of Newcastle to scale it up across the state through the Office of Sport.



Prof Phil Morgan and daughter Bronte



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The impact on Nick and his daughter has been lasting. Now, at home, if I’m not present, if I’m on my phone, Jemima calls me on it and says: ‘What did we learn on Daughters and Dads?’

The “classic” program runs one evening a week for nine weeks. It includes education for the girls and practical parenting tips for the dads, especially ways to engage with their daughters through sport. Each session has rough and tumble play, fitness and, of course, lots of sports.

The results have been astounding. “Not only have the girls significantly improved their physical activity levels, they’ve also improved their ability to perform basic sports skills as well as demonstrating huge improvements in their social and emotional wellbeing.”

As for the dads, they’ve shown improvements to their mental health as well as becoming more active. “Perhaps most importantly the fathers and daughters have both reported they’ve developed stronger relationships with each other. And that strengthening of relationships has transcended across the family so there have been broader outcomes for families.”

This impact was felt by Nick Hockley, Chief Executive of the

T20 World Cup in 2020 and father of two daughters. Nick went on the weekend version of the Dads and Daughter program on Milson Island Sport and Recreation Centre last November with his eight year old daughter Jemima.

“To be with other dads and daughters and really take a step back and spend time with each other was fantastic,” he says. “I really liked the combination of classroom and physical application. Everything we learnt and talked about was backed up by scientific research, like talking about the theories about why sports are beneficial, or the preconceptions about gender stereotypes and trying to debunk those. Then we just did loads of sports.”

With no Wi-Fi on the island and no other interruptions, Nick and his daughter bonded over raft building competitions and toasting marshmallows on the campfire. They also formed new friendships with the other dads and daughters. “Plus there was real, genuine fitness. I’ve lost count of how many burpees and squats we did!”

The impact on Nick and his daughter has been lasting. “Now, at home, if I’m not present, if I’m on my phone, Jemima calls me on it and says: ‘What did we learn on Daughters and Dads?’. Instead of turning on the TV, we’ll take the netball down to the local courts.”

Nick has raved to his friends about the program: “I’d encourage as many people as possible to do the program. I couldn’t speak more highly of it, and all credit to Prof Morgan for pulling it together.”

From Phil’s perspective, the Daughters and Dads program is only just getting started. With four-year funding secured from the NSW Government, there will be future iterations tied to specific sports (the first will be a cricket program), plus he’s received international interest from countries as far spread as the UK and Tonga. But he’s already thinking about its legacy: “I truly believe this will be a game changer for girls in sports. I think the ultimate legacy will be when you have girls who truly believe that their opportunities in life are not defined by their biological sex.”

SMASHING THE GRASS CEILING AS AUSTRALIA'S FIRST FEMALE SUPER RUGBY REFEREE

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I want to leave the jersey in a better place. We need to look at the big picture and work together to make it bigger.

AMY PERRETT



Karen Jones, Amy Zhong and Amy Perrett



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It was so inspiring hearing that Amy Perrett had been through the same as I had. I loved how she pushed herself to improve and move up the ladder.

AMY ZHONG

Standing on the pitch in front of 30,000 people at the 2014 Women's Rugby World Cup final in France, Amy Perrett revelled in the atmosphere on the pitch. She undoubtedly deserved to be there. And yet, as Australia's first female professional rugby referee, there was still a moment of self-doubt.

Amy swiftly summoned her inner voice, firmly saying "You got selected for a reason. Have confidence in your own ability." A moment later, she went on to successfully referee her first major international game.

Since then, Amy has conquered some other big life goals including refereeing at the Rio 2016 Olympic Games, getting married, having a baby and returning to the pitch after giving birth.

But it hasn't always been an easy run.

Amy started playing Rugby when she was seven years old and her twin brother's team needed an extra player. As soon as people started commenting about a girl playing rugby, her brother Paul simply stated "A girl can still beat you!". And most of the time she did.

However, when she reached 12, Amy couldn't play in a mixed team any longer and there were no female teams for her to continue in the sport she loved so much.

Instead of giving up, her mum encouraged her to do a

refereeing course. As a junior referee, Amy fitted right in. "I copped the same flack as the males, got paid the same, treated the same," she recalls.

But at the senior level, it was a different story. "I would hear comments like 'nice legs' or I was asked on a date when packing a scrum," said Amy. "It was the first time I felt I didn't belong in my sport. I had an instant lack of trust in my ability."

A turning point came when she was 18 and refereeing an under 21 game. A coach was yelling sexist abuse at her throughout the game. "I ran to my mum and cried," she said.

Amy wasn't sure if she should persist as a female referee. "I was letting my negative experiences cloud my ambitions," she remembers.

Luckily, a ref coach was in the crowd and took her under his wing. "He showed me a pathway that I couldn't see, introducing me to the International Rugby world."

With very few female role models in Rugby when she was growing up, Amy now has a passion for mentoring and has done a lot of work with up and coming female officials, including speaking recently at the ICC Women's T20 World Cup Girls Leadership Forum.

Amy Zhong, a netball player and umpire from Tempe High School attended the Girls Leadership Forum. She asked Amy Perrett about dealing with the guilt after making a bad call.

Perrett replied "You think we cop a lot of flack from the sidelines but it's nothing compared to what we give ourselves."

As a young girl, Amy Zhong also had big dreams. "I always wanted to be a NSW Swifts netball player".

She is now an umpire, which has given her a different perspective. "When I first started umpiring, sometimes the parents were really nice, but other times they question whether you can umpire as you are only starting out."

"When I heard Amy talk about people doubting her competence, I really got it," said Zhong. "It was so inspiring hearing that Amy Perrett had been through the same as I had. I loved how she pushed herself to improve and move up the ladder."

Being an umpire has given Amy Zhong a different perspective. "When I watch a professional game, I spend more time watching the umpires than the players. I admire the way they control the game. I now appreciate all the roles in sport."

With another Olympic Games firmly in her sights, Amy Perrett continues to be a role model for young females aspiring to take their place in the sporting arena.

As she told the girls, "I want to leave the jersey in a better place. We need to look at the big picture and work together to make it bigger," said Perrett.

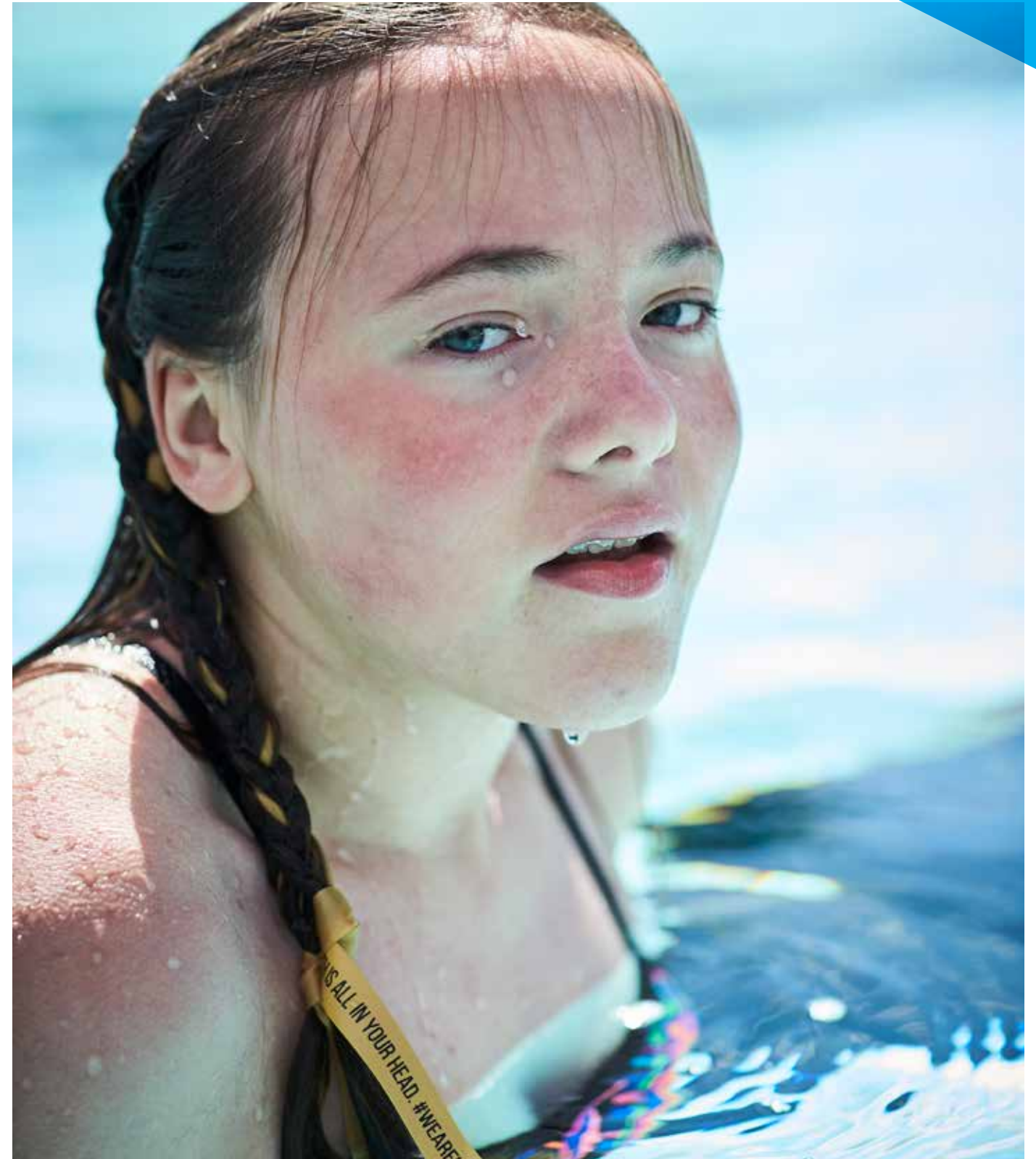
THE GOLDEN RIBBON THAT MAKES TAYLOR UNBREAKABLE

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I wear the ribbon of strength to remind myself that strength is all in my head and, no matter how hard swimming seems some days, I am unbreakable.

TAYLOR WALKER-LEAR

It's 5am and Taylor Walker-Lear's mum is braiding her hair, carefully weaving a golden ribbon through the plait. Handwritten along the ribbon are the words: 'Anything is possible when I set my mind to it'. Taylor is getting ready for one of her thrice weekly training sessions at Leichhardt Aquatic Centre. She's a 14 year-old girl living with cerebral palsy and a paralympic swimmer in the making. "I wear the ribbon of strength to remind myself that strength is all in my head and, no matter how hard swimming seems some days, I am unbreakable," she says.



Taylor Walker-Lear

Photo by Sue Stubbs

“It’s almost like putting on a crown or an armour. Lots of professional athletes braid their hair. Weaving a ribbon into the braid is a great reminder that strength is all in your head.”

STEPHANIE DOYLE,
PANTENE BRAND MANAGER

She’s echoing the words of one of her idols, Paralympic gold medalist Ellie Cole, who starred in the Pantene ‘Ribbon of Strength’ campaign when it first launched in late 2018. Taylor is one of thousands of young female athletes who are now braiding their hair with the golden ribbons before partaking in sport.

“It’s almost like putting on a crown or an armour,” explains Stephanie Doyle, Pantene Brand Manager and one of the driving forces behind the Ribbon of Strength campaign. “Lots of professional athletes braid their hair. Weaving a ribbon into the braid is a great reminder that strength is all in your head.”

Pantene has always had ‘strong is beautiful’ as one of their taglines but, back in 2018, they were feeling a disconnect with their audience. When they began exploring women in sport and carried out research that revealed 57% of women stop playing sport by the age of 24 and, digging deeper, that 2 out of 5 of those women drop out because of fear and self-doubt, they saw an opportunity to connect with Australian consumers in a unique and inspiring way.

Partnering with some of Australia’s top female athletes, including the Westfield Matildas, Pantene are encouraging all women to overcome their fears, find their inner strength and actively participate in sport through braiding their hair with the ribbon inscribed with personal messages of motivation. Wearing the ribbon has become a symbol to show the world that women belong on the pitch, at the track, or in the pool.

To date Pantene has distributed over 5,000 ribbons to girls, set up braid bars at sponsored events and is building upon the momentum with a ‘Panteenagers’ campaign where they’re

taking the athletes featured in the campaign into schools to run resilience, exercise and leadership drills.

One of these athletes is Matilda’s midfielder and 2014 AFC Women’s Player of the Year, Katrina Gorry. “We wanted to partner with Katrina as she had an amazing story of strength,” says Stephanie. “She had broken her ankle just before the World Cup and had to work hard to build back not only her physical strength but also emotional strength to get back into the national team.”

Katrina’s ribbon is inscribed with the words: ‘Be Strong, Think Strong, Play Strong’. “I think a lot about our game is a mental thing,” she explains.

“There are so many challenges that you have to face and if you can think strong in those moments, then you play strong.”

Katrina has witnessed first-hand the female drop off from sport estimating that 90% of the girls she played football with at school, who dreamed of becoming professional athletes, no longer play. “The biggest challenge was women’s sport not being as established as the men’s,” she says, citing lack of pathways, second-rate playing fields, facilities and salaries as the biggest issues. “Trying to balance uni, work, training and everything to get by and pay the bills was something we all battled through at the start of our careers.”

Fortunately women’s sport has come a long way, especially in the past two years. “We’ve seen a huge shift in women’s sport across all codes,” she says. “It’s looking really exciting.” In fact 2020 was to be ‘the year of women’s sport’ and there has been much concern about this being derailed due to COVID-19.

Katrina is reflective and, despite the rescheduling of the Olympics and her transfer to play in Norway being put on hold, is optimistic about the future. “COVID-19 probably came at a good time for a lot of our national team players,” she says, adding that the break was welcome after back to back seasons. The Matildas are currently training online and taking part in weekly Zoom sessions. “It’s been a good reset for a lot of us and it will make the fire that bit bigger when we get back out there.”

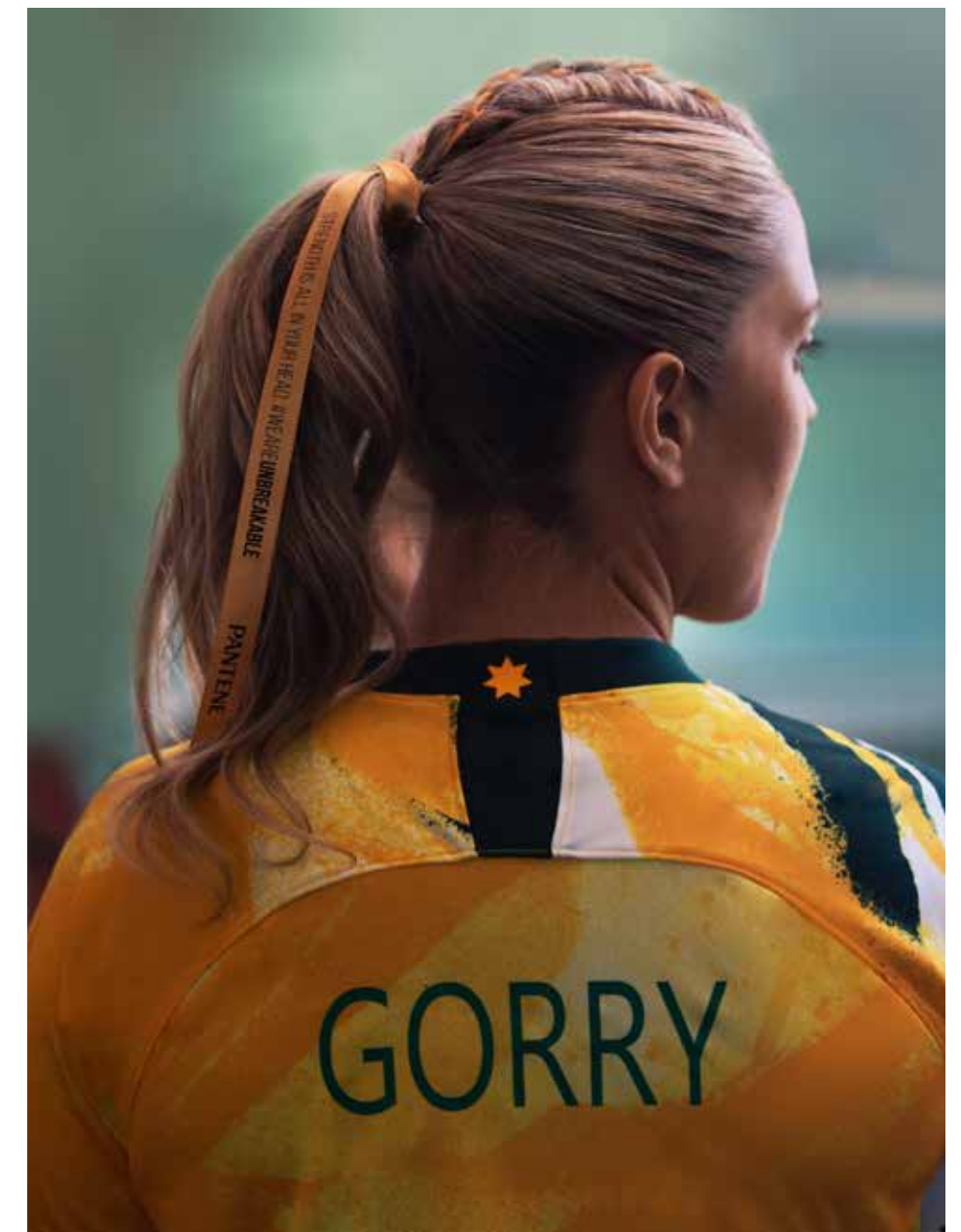
For the Ribbon of Strength campaign, COVID-19 has been a period of ideation and adaptation. “2020 would have been such a strong year for women’s sport with the Olympics and

all the sponsorship and positive coverage around women’s sport,” says Stephanie. “But we’re still optimistic and building momentum and I’m glad to be a part of that messaging.”

Stephanie loves hearing from future sporting stars, like Taylor, about how the Ribbon of Strength campaign is helping them and spurring them on.

“At the end of the day we are a hair care brand, so it’s lovely when consumers reach out and say that this campaign has had such a big impact on their lives.”

Because of COVID-19 restrictions, Taylor was unable to train in the pool for more than 12 weeks which took a toll on her mentally and physically. Fortunately her pool has re-opened and she’s back doing laps. “It’s my happy place,” she says. “I felt like I’d returned home.” The fourteen year old remains focused on her goal - to one day win Paralympic medals the same colour as the gold ribbon in her hair.



Kat Gorry