

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

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AMY PERRETT



Karen Jones, Amy Zhong and Amy Perrett



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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.