



BREAKING NEW GROUND - HOW AUSTRALIA FELL IN LOVE WITH THE MATILDAS

Sarah Walsh,
Head of Women's Football
and former Matilda

Bio and Introduction



Sarah Walsh is a former Australian international athlete with 70 caps and 35 international goals for the Matildas. She has a decorated career including appearances in the 2004 Olympics and 2007 FIFA World Cup. She clinched victory at the 2010 Women's Asian Cup.

Since then, Sarah has evolved into an accomplished sports executive, Logie-nominated commentator, and compelling public speaker. Her firsthand experience in high-performance sports has translated into advocating for pay equity and inclusion, spearheading innovation in governance and policy driving social change at all levels of football.

Notably, as Head of Women's Football for Football Australia, she influenced the strategy that generated a staggering \$357M for football's World Cup leveraging strategy through government and commercial investment, with an additional \$200M earmarked to improve community infrastructure for women and girls across all sports. As hosts of the most commercial FIFA Women's World Cup, the Matildas shattered attendance and viewership records, drawing over 11 million viewers during the semi-final against England, making it the single highest rating TV program of all time.

Recently ranked 22nd on News Corps' list of 100 most influential women in sport, Sarah's illustrious playing and professional career converge in this pivotal moment.

Today she serves as the Head of Women's Football, Women's World Cup Legacy and Inclusion at Football Australia.

The Story

By the time the Matildas reached the semi-finals of the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup they had broken all of the records. They had achieved record TV viewership, record match attendance and record merchandise sales. The fan sites around the country were so far over capacity, the state governments had to add new locations. Sometimes that meant designating large stadiums which were about to host men's AFL games as fan sites. The AFL games around the country stopped to watch "that" penalty shoot out.



The players themselves have become household names. From Cortnee Vine who now has people stop her in the street to say thank you, to Hayley Raso and Mary Fowler who were impact players while Sam Kerr was injured and even Katrina Gorry who returned to playing from having her first child, The Matildas went from a few iconic players to a team of beloved champions. Young girls signed up to play. Parents talk about how their sons asked if there was a mens version of the team.

Australian politicians took to social media to be associated with the team. The Minister for Defence announced that his portfolio could be managed by Matildas Goalkeeper Mackenzie Arnold. The Minister for Sport declared she would like to be the Minister for the Matildas. Sam Kerr's calf made record headlines. We saw whole flights of passengers watching the games over in-flight entertainment.

Finally, at the end of the journey, even though the team didn't take home the silverware, they delivered a win for women and girls across all sports, attracting a further \$200M from the government to improve community facilities.

So what conditions had to exist on and off the field to allow a women's sports team to capture the hearts and minds of all of Australia? And what changes now in the industry of sport, broadcast, media, corporate and broader society as a result of Australia falling in love with the Matildas?

As the Head of Women's Football in Australia and a former Matilda (played from 2004-2012), Sarah shares the incredible story that led to record broadcast and engagement metrics for any Australian sports team ever, mens or womens. Sarah also looks at the innovation around the Matildas that managed to create a 5x multiplier in brand value, and questions what changes now as a result of Australia falling in love with the Matildas.



Customer Testimonials

"I think i'm finally coming down from the euphoria of yesterday. From the joy of getting to know you to the epic line out the door. I can't thank you enough for trusting us to share your story with us and being part of this experience." **SXSW**

"Sarah was unreal. Had the whole audience in awe for 60 minutes. I can see why she's been so successful". **Culture Amp**

"Sarah was amazing! My favourite quote was "I think what we've been able to achieve is that no one can ever say again that no one is watching, that no one is paying and that it's not commercial." Everyone loved the session and left so inspired." - **Microsoft**

