



The FIFA Women's World Cup will be held across Australia and New Zealand throughout July and August 2023. It will see 32 nations compete on the international stage and is estimated to become the most attended women's sporting event in history.

This edition of 'Walls that Talk' is dedicated to celebrating *Women in Sport*. This collection showcases talented sportswomen with strong connections to Maitland who have excelled in their field of sport and have competed in national and international tournaments, including the Commonwealth, Olympic and Paralympic Games.



To visit the Walls that Talk website, scan the QR code.



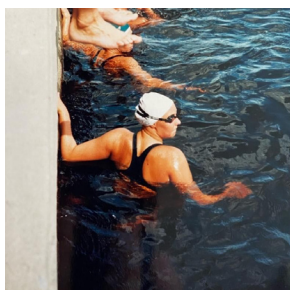
### **Melinda Thompson**

Born and raised in Maitland, Melinda Thompson is an inspirational sportswoman and outstanding role model for students and adults alike. Melinda is the winner of many titles in athletics as well as other sports that she excelled in at regional, state, national, international, professional and veteran levels.

In 1980, Melinda was the winner of the first professional women's foot race over 1000 metres in Australia and is listed in Guinness Book of Records for this achievement. In 1984, hosted in Port Macquarie, Melinda was the first woman to run professionally against men and win in a 70 metres race.

Melinda Thompson was recognised for her sporting achievement in 2019 being inducted into the Maitland Hall of Fame. Today, Melinda a retired high school teacher and continues to promote excellence in sports having taught and mentored some of today's known sports champions.

Learn more about our Hall of Fame inductees here: [maitland.nsw.gov.au/services/community-services/hall-of-fame](https://maitland.nsw.gov.au/services/community-services/hall-of-fame)



### **Kelly Puplett (nee Driffield)**

Kelly Driffield, Maitland local, is one of the best open water swimmers Australia has produced. She has won countless open water events and was world number three in 1998. She won silver at the Oceania Games in 1997 and set a Guinness World Record in 1997, where she completed a 24 hour swim for a distance of over 95km. She has also coached Masters and Disabled Squads at the University of Newcastle.

In 1998, Kelly represented Australia at the FINA World Cup Series, became the Australian Open champion, and claimed the Ocean Marathon at Atlantic City, USA. Over her career, she consistently placed in the top 10 in several of the international swimming marathon circuits, and in 2021 was inducted into the Australian Marathon Swimming Hall of Fame in 2021.

Kelly was inducted into the Maitland Hall of Fame in 2016, recognised for her many accolades.

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### **Maddie Elliot**

Gillieston Heights resident Maddison Elliot, OAM is a powerhouse in the pool. At age 13, Maddison became the youngest Australian Paralympian to win gold as part of the 4x100m freestyle relay at London 2012. Adding to her London Paralympic success, Maddison achieved a silver in 50m freestyle and bronze in 100m and 400m freestyle and she was also awarded an OAM for Services to Sport the following year.

Maddison continued her Paralympic success at Rio in 2016 winning three gold and two silvers. Maddison's success in the pool on the world stage is nothing short of impressive, with her talent recognised as 2016 Female Paralympian of the year. Today, Maddison is currently enjoying time out of the pool but has not ruled out a return to swimming.

For more details on Maddison's Olympic achievements visit: [paralympic.org.au/athlete/maddison-elliott](https://paralympic.org.au/athlete/maddison-elliott)



### **Alison Forman \***

Born in Maitland, midfielder Alison Forman was the Matildas very first Olympic captain and led the team in their Olympic debut at Sydney 2000 where they finished seventh.

Forman started every game at Sydney 2000, along with every game at the 1995 and 1999 FIFA Women's World Cups. Throughout her career she represented the country 95 times and was inducted into the FFA Hall of Fame.

Her 95 appearances with the Matildas ranks her ninth in Australia's Women's national team appearances list. She also spent ten years playing abroad at the highly ranked Danish club Fortuna Hjørring, earning player of the year in 1996.

Read more about Alison's career and excellence, visit: [footballaustralia.com.au/alison-forman](https://footballaustralia.com.au/alison-forman)





### **Olivia Gollan**

Olivia Gollan, from Maitland, embarked on her competitive cycling journey at the age of 26. Her talent and dedication led her to receive a prestigious full scholarship from the Australian Institute of Sport. In 2003, she secured victory in the Australian Road Championship and earned a spot among the top ten cyclists globally.

At the Athens 2004 Olympic Games, Gollan was an integral part of Australia's gold medal winning team, supporting Sara Carrigan to win the road race. The following year, in 2005, she joined the renowned German team, 'Equipe Nürnberger Versicherung,' which was widely regarded as the leading women's team at the time. In 2006 she was part of another gold medal winning team performance, supporting Natalie Bates to her win at the Melbourne Commonwealth Games.

Olivia was also the International Women's Representative to the UCI for several years, advocating for improved conditions for women in cycling. Presently, Olivia Gollan's passion for cycling remains strong, and she actively promotes the importance of cycling safety.

To read more about Olivia's Olympic cycling success visit: [olympics.com.au/olympians/olivia-gollan](https://olympics.com.au/olympians/olivia-gollan)



### **Brodie Benson (nee Smith)**

24 year old Maitland local, Brodie Benson (nee Smith) became a star at the 2017 World Goalball Youth Championships, leading Australia to a historic gold medal against an undefeated Russia.

She then joined 'The Aussie Belles' for the 2018 Worlds in Sweden and represented Australia at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympics. Despite initial losses to Israel and China, they secured a thrilling victory over Canada, their first goalball win since 1996. The team's biggest triumph came with a 4-1 win against the Russian Paralympic Committee. However, their Tokyo campaign ended with a 9-6 quarter-final defeat to Turkey.

Brodie is working hard preparing for the upcoming IBSA World Games in Birmingham in August 2023 as she strives to be selected for the Paris 2024 Paralympics. Off the court, Brodie is a high school teacher in Maitland, who enjoys reading, movies, and board games.

To learn more about Goalball visit: [goalballaustralia.org](https://goalballaustralia.org)

Or watch this video: [youtu.be/0bZ51jzmbAQ](https://youtu.be/0bZ51jzmbAQ)



### **Mollie Gray ^**

Maitland local and former Defence veteran, Mollie Gray proved to be a fierce force in the world of rugby, leaving opponents in a "try"-ing state. As a proud member of the Australian Women's National Rugby Union Team, commonly known as the Wallaroos she tackled her way to success, making her international debut in 2014 against New Zealand.

Gray's rugby journey took her to remarkable heights, with notable achievements that include securing a silver medal at the 2015 Pacific Games, triumphing in the 2016 Laurie O'Reilly Cup, and making her mark at the 2014 and 2017 Women's Rugby World Cups.

From 2017- 2019 Mollie transitioned from the field to commentating for both Fox News and Rugby Australia, before switching focus to photography.

Learn more about Mollie's Rugby achievements here: [classicwallabies.com.au/players/mollie-gray](https://classicwallabies.com.au/players/mollie-gray)



## Caitlin Wood

Hailing from Tenambit, 26 year old Caitlin Wood lives life in the fast lane becoming the first Australian woman to compete full time on the European stage of Motorsport.

Her motorsport career began at the age of seven, driving karts which evolved into her competing through the junior ranks of Australian Motorsport and progressing onto the world stage at age 18.

Having competed in multiple championships including the European GT4 Championship, Blancpain GT Series in a GT3 Lamborghini and the inaugural all women's Formula 3 Championship - The W Series her future successes in Motorsport are within reach. Caitlin most recently became the first Australian woman to not only race but win her class at the legendary Nurburgring Nordschleife circuit in Germany.

Together with her Motorsport endeavours, Caitlin is an active speaker for International Womens Day and champion for equality and diversity in sport.

To cheer on and learn more about Caitlin: [instagram.com/caitlinwoodracing](https://www.instagram.com/caitlinwoodracing)



## Gai Taylor

Gai Taylor, who was born and lives in Maitland, is an exceptionally talented Sportswoman. She played touch football when she was younger and was in the NSW Touch Football Team in 1985 and the national team in 1986. She represented her state and country for 15 years and went to three worlds cups (one as captain). In 1991 Gai founded a local junior touch competition and she has coached many teams. Gai has also won BMX State and National racing titles over the last eight years.

In 1986, Gai played in the first event Women's test match against New Zealand. She continued to succeed as one of the most 'capped' Australian Women's representatives of all time, acquiring 30 caps for Australia (26 World Cup Games, and 4 Test Matches), fulfilling the role of Team Captain at various points in her career.

Gai was inducted into the Maitland Hall of Fame in 2016 to honour to achievements.

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## References:

Image supplied by Melinda Thompson, Kelly Puplett, Gai Taylor, Olivia Gollan, Caitlin Wood and Paralympics Australia

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