

# FOR THE LOVE OF THE GAME

WITH  
BERNIE PRAMBERG



bpramberg1@hotmail.com

**R**UTH Blackburn could be a case study in managing a busy, balanced life in sport and career.

An elite footballer who played three seasons in the W-League for Brisbane Roar and Adelaide United, Blackburn, 25, has a Masters degree in psychology specialising in educational and developmental psychology.

She is playing for Brisbane club, The Gap, and working in research into the use of medicinal cannabis in the treatment of child epilepsy.

"It was really hard to balance my studies with my sport but it is something I highly recommend," Blackburn said.

"Although it can be difficult, it is great to have another outlet in your life other than sport. It teaches you time management and sets you up for a career ... and there is no guarantee of that for women in football.

"Sport should be an outlet and stress management avenue for other pursuits."

After playing for Brisbane and Adelaide in the W-League, Blackburn returned to The Gap, the club she first joined in the under-12s.

Last season she captained The Gap to their second successive title in the Queensland section of the National Premier League.

"It's hard to walk away from football when you have played at W-League level," Blackburn said. "It is so exciting, fast-paced and intense. You have a lot of fun and make good friends.

"I still love the game and will keep playing until I get arthritis in my knees or something like that."

Blackburn was identified early as a talented footballer, playing rep footy as a junior, earning a Queensland Academy of Sport scholarship and recognition in the Young Matildas squad.

At 16 she was a member of the Roar squad which won the inaugural W-League premiership in the 2008-09 season.

"I was mainly a bench player," Blackburn said.

A tall defender, she ap-



**FINDING THE BALANCE:** Researcher and sportswoman Ruth Blackburn; and (below) Blackburn playing for the Roar in 2015.



peared for the Roar in a losing grand final seven years later before returning to her club.

"In the early days the W-League was really only open to women and girls who were full-time in state sports academies where you trained every day," Blackburn said. "You had to make big sacrifices in other areas of your life.

"Fortunately, that has changed for the better.

"Players can now be selected from NPL competitions,

which allows for a broader scope for opportunity.

"It is very important for female sport in Australia, certainly in football, that players are given a chance to balance their sport with other pursuits."

The Gap FC has been a powerhouse of women's football and Blackburn said a strong culture encouraged players to pursue studies and career outside the sport.

"One of the reasons I love playing for The Gap is head

coach Rob Askew and the older girls try to emphasise the importance of keeping up study and interests outside football," Blackburn said.

Blackburn has been involved coaching Gap junior teams and works with the Skills Acquisition Program for girls aged 9-11 years.

Away from football, Blackburn's work with Sydney University's Lambert Initiative involves launching what is known as the "Pelican Study" in Queensland.

"The study has been running in NSW since August last year but is relatively new to Queensland," Blackburn said.

"It is a very dynamic time in the field of medicinal cannabis in Queensland. In some respects we lead Australia in recognising the struggle those who have been using cannabis to treat their medical conditions illegally have been going through.

"I can see the culture

around using cannabis as a medicine changing as more and more people speak out about their experiences.

"A common story is of parents using cannabis oils or tinctures to treat their child with epilepsy.

"We are guided by international research on the topic, specifically in paediatric epilepsy. The research has shown cannabis medication has a wide range of benefits from pain management to treating conditions such as multiple sclerosis and epileptic seizures.

"Parents do not take the decision to treat their child's epilepsy with cannabis products lightly, but for many, they have tried countless conventional treatments without success. Parents will do whatever it takes to improve their child's quality of life.

"I enjoy the challenge of my work. And I like playing football as part of my life, but it is not the centre of my life ..."



**NEW LEVEL:** Karla Mostert.

## Karla brings a continent of interest

**GREG DAVIS**  
@gregdavis\_cmail

**SUNSHINE** Coast defender Karla Mostert says the build-up to next weekend's Suncorp Super Netball grand final is bigger than a Test match.

The South African has been the quiet achiever in the Lightning defensive circle in the team's march to the season showpiece with her experience and poise proving priceless.

She showed all the nous gained from 53 Tests to produce a critical match-swinging interception late in the major-semi-final win over Melbourne Vixens last weekend.

The 27-year-old is in her first club season in Australia and said being part of the decider for the world's best domestic competition was a thrill.

"This is a whole new level because it's with the best players in the world and against the best in the world," she said.

"I'm excited about it and just embracing this moment.

"It was a dream come true being part of this team and this (grand final) is just stepping up even more."

Mostert hails from Bloemfontein in South Africa and came to Suncorp Super Netball via Team Bath in England.

She said the South African netball community would be right behind the Lightning.

"We've always followed it because Australia and New Zealand are the best in the world," she said.

"Knowing a South African is going to be playing, they'll follow it more."

The Lightning will play the winner of tonight's preliminary final between the Vixens and Giants in the decider on June 17.

### GOLF

#### Suzann spot on

**SUZANN** Pettersen and Mi Hyang Lee each shot an eight-under 64 yesterday to share the first-round lead at the Manulife LPGA Classic in Ontario.

Hyo Joo Kim, Gonzalez Escall and Shanshan Feng were one shot behind at 65, followed another shot back by Alena Sharp, Emily Pedersen, and Jodi Ewart Shadoff.

Pettersen, who recently lost her yardage book for the course and had to write notes from scratch this week, said she trusted her eye and it paid off with six birdies over an eight-hole stretch.

Brittany Marchand, a Symetra Tour player entered as a sponsor's invite, was in a group at 67.

### ATHLETICS

#### De Grasse fast

**SPRINTER** Andre De Grasse blew past the field to post a dominating win in the 200m yesterday at the Golden Gala Pietro Mennea meet in Rome.

For Aries Merritt, victory in the 110m hurdles marked his first Diamond League victory since a kidney transplant two years ago.

At 20.01sec, Canadian De Grasse established a personal season best, keeping him on track to take over the world title from Usain Bolt, who does not plan to compete in the 200m at the world championships in London in August.

De Grasse already took silver behind Bolt at last year's Rio Olympics, pushing the Jamaican great in the semi-finals.

### GOLF

#### Cink sinks them

**FORMER** British Open champion Stewart Cink, Matt Every, Scott Brown and Sebastian Munoz carded six-under 64s yesterday to lead a low-scoring first round at the US PGA Tour St Jude Classic.

Cink, who hasn't won since lifting the 2009 Open Championship, birdied his final hole of the day, the ninth at TPC Southwind.

Every, who won the most recent of his two PGA Tour titles in 2014, is hoping to turn around a disappointing season in the final tune-up for next week's US Open at Erin Hills.

The leading quartet had a one-shot lead over South African Charl Schwartzel and Australian Matt Jones.



**MEMPHIS STATE OF MIND:** Stewart Cink shot a 64.

### MOTORSPORT

#### Too slow: Alonso

**FERNANDO** Alonso repeated his threat to quit not only McLaren-Honda, but also Formula One, yesterday when he faced reporters before this weekend's Canadian Grand Prix.

The two-time world champion, who revelled in the freedom he experienced at the Indianapolis 500 two weeks ago, when he retired while running seventh, cited two possible reasons for making an exit after 16 years.

The Spaniard said that if McLaren were not able to win by September, he would leave the team and added that if the sport increased its race calendar to 25 or more he would quit. "A third world championship is my biggest priority," Alonso said.

### CYCLING

#### Porte in the hunt

**AUSTRALIA'S** Richie Porte remains in the box seat to take overall honours in the Criterium du Dauphine after young German Phil Bauhaus beat the big-name sprinters to victory on stage five yesterday.

The 22-year-old edged out four French riders at the finish to claim his biggest career win.

Porte won Wednesday's individual time trial to sit 27sec adrift of overall leader Thomas De Gendt (Lotto-Soudal), a margin maintained yesterday.

Bauhaus took his first World Tour victory ahead of stage two winner Arnaud Demare and Bryan Coquard, while Nacer Bouhanni and Alexander Kristoff could only manage fifth and sixth respectively.