

# WOMEN SUPPORTING WOMEN

Women are increasingly turning to each other for powerful learning and mentoring opportunities in the Australian coaching community – with a range of benefits flowing through the sport.

**VIVIENNE CHRISTIE** reports



**T**he collective coaching credentials couldn't be disputed when a group of women coaches gathered for a workshop during the recent Australian Junior Claycourt Championships in Canberra. Each of the participants had been named as recipients of Tennis Australia's President's Women in Tennis Scholarships and as established coaching professionals, their contribution to the sport was already vast.

"I'm delighted to congratulate this terrific group of 20 women from across the country on being awarded coaching scholarships," said Tennis Australia President and Chair Jayne Hrdlicka.

"They've already achieved and contributed so much to tennis and I look forward to following their continued progression."

Alongside the value of the women's combined coaching experience, the opportunity to connect and learn from each other was arguably even more profound. Building a network and support system of coaches through Tennis

Australia's Coach Connect program – which aims to engage, educate and connect women coaches through mentoring and professional development opportunities – was a key focus for the diverse group. Ranging in age from 18 to their 60s, some of the women had travelled from as far as regional Western Australia, as well as Darwin and Northern Queensland, to participate.

Former professional player Nicole Pratt, now Women's Coach Lead at Tennis Australia, was a driving force in establishing the Coach Connect program and is delighted to see its positive impact. "What has been a surprise to me is how having women at different ages and stages within the coaching pathway has been a winning formula," said Pratt, who is also the coach of Australia's Billie Jean King Cup (formerly Fed Cup) team. "It has been a melting pot of past experiences, new ideas but commonly a passion to give back to others through tennis."

Helen Magill, whose award-winning coaching career spans more than four decades, noted how receiving a President's Women in Tennis Scholarship had helped her make valuable new connections in the sport.

"I want this group of female coaches to form a powerful collective force, be role models and mentors, and help shape the pathway for young females starting their coaching journey," said Magill, who is based in Parkes, New South Wales. "I love connecting with like-minded female coaches and the Coach Connect program enables us to

continue to build relationships, share knowledge, skills and gain confidence in our own abilities, both on and off the court."

With Coach Connect mentoring accessible as an online digital program, other women coaches are also benefitting from valuable networking opportunities. Pratt explains how relationships can be structured or more informal, often flourishing with a flexible approach.

"Mentoring can be as small as a question about a particular topic and the mentor provides their opinion and it's a one-off, other mentoring relationships have

been ongoing with a regular catch-up once a month," she said. "The beauty of mentorship is that it can be flexible and available at any time that coaches need assistance."

Noting that her own mentors "have been quite organic over the years", Magill relates how she has "surrounded herself with a diverse group of people who continually challenge me" and is grateful that this increasingly includes more women.

"When I started coaching over 40 years ago there were hardly any other women I knew in coaching, so a lot of my mentors early on were males," she said.

"Now though, I have quite a few very valuable female mentors who I reach out to."

Karen Webber, a former top Australian junior player who transitioned into a successful coaching career, has a fine-tuned appreciation of seeing more women in those roles. With several mentors supporting her successful journey to establish Ultimate Tennis Melbourne, Webber is now proud to be a role model to several younger women coaches.

"I grew up surrounded by boys, so I had a completely different experience. I was always training with male coaches. I was always craving a female role model but back in the day, the opportunities weren't there," explained the Melburnian, who notes the unique empathy and understanding that women can provide as coaches. "So I like to give girls more opportunity to reach out and enjoy what I have over the years and even if it's not



a full-time career, it can be a part-time career for them."

The benefits are not only significant for the women being mentored, but often provide growth for the mentors too. Webber cherishes the opportunity to learn from her trainee coaches. "They've got young minds, it's amazing what they can absorb – and they can teach you a lot of things as well," she enthused, noting the value of forming an enduring connection. "When you're trying to achieve goals together, you have to be on the same page."

Genevieve Lorbergs, a former President's Women in Tennis Scholarship recipient and now a Talent Programs Assistant Coach at Tennis Australia, agrees.

"I've engaged in mentoring relationships at every stage of my coaching pathway and believe it's critical to have supportive, engaging, and experienced people to learn from and bounce ideas off," said the Victorian, who counts Magill among that supportive group.

"Seeking out mentors who foster a psychologically safe environment, promote learning and support development often creates enormous confidence in my ability and belief that with the right strategic approach, I can progress forward."

And as more women utilise networking opportunities like Coach Connect, the benefits flow through the sport. Since 2021,

the number of women's coaches in Australia has increased from 26 to 28 per cent. While Pratt is proud to see the organisation "shift the dial", she's prouder still to see more women thriving in the sport.

"For me personally it's not so much about the number, it's creating opportunities for women

coaches to thrive, to be recognised for the amazing work that they do in their communities and the inspiration that provides to so many players," said Pratt.

"The challenges and barriers for women coaches are real, and if we can assist in supporting

and creating limitless possibilities for coaches, regardless of where they coach within the pathway, then everyone benefits." **ATM**

**For more information on Coach Connect, visit [tennis.com.au/coach-connect](http://tennis.com.au/coach-connect)**

## 2023 PRESIDENT'S WOMEN IN TENNIS SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

- Nicole Bauer [Gippsland, Vic.]
- Jasmina Behlic [Melbourne, Vic.]
- Patrea Bojack [Home Hill, Qld]
- Madisson Bowler [North Coast, NSW]
- Dubravka Cupac [Melbourne, Vic.]
- Julie Fidler [Melbourne, Vic.]
- Lucie Frazer [Perth, WA]
- Megan Henry [Wheat Belt, WA]
- Christina Horiatopoulos [Sydney, NSW]
- Jasmin Iaquinto [Melbourne, Vic.]
- Michelle Jaggard-Lai [Sunshine Coast, Qld]
- Tina Keown [Melbourne, Vic.]
- Genevieve Knight [Brisbane, Qld]
- Helen Magill [Parkes, NSW]
- Talia Pati [Melbourne, Vic.]
- Ellise Perks [North Coast, NSW]
- Cherie Roe [Canberra, ACT]
- Georgina Sesto [Cairns Qld]
- Suzaan Stoltz [Brisbane, Vic.]
- Emily Webb [Darwin, NT]