

Dream girl who scores runs in her sleep

WILL SWANTON
CRICKET



An exuberant Australian girl called Ellyse Perry was becoming rather addicted to the free-flowing rhythms of a bowling action and the solid *thwump* of leather on willow and so she started asking her father the most traditional of summertime questions: "Dad, can we go down to the nets?"

What a wonderful image it is, of a quietly caring father teaching his tomboy daughter to play cricket when it was hardly the fashionable thing for either of them to be doing. When there was no way of knowing a fulltime career could possibly come from a sport she could only play on the weekends if she teamed up with the ratbag under-12 boys. And what a wonderful image it is, too, of the promising young athlete putting her head on the pillow at night and feeling as if she was still bending her back or hitting through the V in the Hassell Park nets in the northern Sydney suburb of St Ives.

"When you've been doing something all day as a kid, you close your eyes at night and you can feel like you're still doing it," Perry tells *The Weekend Australian*. "You know what I mean? I remember going to Wonderland as a kid and riding the rides all day and when I went to bed that night, I could see myself on the rides again. Or you spend a whole day in the surf and that night, when you're trying to get to sleep, you feel like you're still surfing. You can see yourself going up and down the waves all over again."

"With sport, I'd close my eyes at night and I feel like I was still playing the sport I'd been doing that day. When I was a kid, the night before the grand finals of cricket or soccer, I'd dream about the game. I'd normally dream that we turned up late because my family was pretty notorious for being late. But I definitely experienced that sensation of putting your head on the pillow and just reliving the cricket you've played that day. They're not dreams, but you're still thinking about playing your sport when you close your eyes and you're trying to get to sleep. That's how much you enjoy it, I think. That's how much you consumed you are by it. That's how much it means to you. I still have nights like that."

And what an incredible image too of the grown-up 28-year-old tomboy making a record-breaking double century in a historic day-night Ashes Test at North Sydney Oval, just 15km from where it all began in the St Ives nets, while her friends and her family, including father Mark, mother Kathy and her husband, the Australian rugby player Matt Toomua, huddled in the grandstand. Perry's first post-match quote was a ripper. Oh, she grinned. That was fun!

There was the blooper-reel image of Perry puckering up and kissing her helmet when she thought she had reached 200 with a six, only for it to be ruled a four straight after her theatrical celebrations. Another terrific summation from her. It is what it is. Whoops! But above all else was the image of the tomboy waving her bat at a large and rapturous crowd as she walked off with 213no, the highest ever Test score by an Australian woman, and the moment when the achievement sank in. She was halfway to the pavilion when her chin hit her chest, when her face crumpled and when the tears welled in her eyes. Wonderful. Emotional. Heartfelt. Every tomboy has a shared characteristic, and that characteristic is that they're fighters. Nothing about a 374-ball, eight-hour innings is easy. Her performance was epic.

And then what? "Back to the hotel," she says. "The hotel we were staying at had gone to a party shop and purchased some balloons. At the time they purchased them, I must have been on 167 (her dinner score) because they bought balloons with a one, a six and a



HOLLIE ADAMS/JOHN APPEYARD/PHIL HILLYARD

'I always remember Dad throwing me balls down at the nets': Ellyse Perry will play for the Sydney Sixers in WBBL III from today, main picture; Perry on her way to 213 not out for Australia against England in the day-night Ashes Test at North Sydney Oval, below right

WOMEN'S BIG BASH TODAY

Sydney Thunder v Renegades
NORTH SYDNEY OVAL, 1.45PM

Adelaide Strikers v Hurricanes
GLENELG OVAL, 2.30PM

Sydney Sixers v Melbourne Stars
NORTH SYDNEY OVAL, 6.15PM

TOMORROW

Scorchers v Brisbane Heat
NORTH SYDNEY OVAL, 10.45AM

Adelaide Strikers v Hurricanes
GLENELG OVAL, 12PM

Sydney Thunder v Sixers
NORTH SYDNEY OVAL, 2PM

All times AEDT



seven on them. They put them in my room with a card, which was so nice of them. But they scribbled on the card about being really sorry that the numbers were wrong. The card said, 'We thought you were on 167 but when we went back to get a two, a one and a three, the shop was closed!' That was kind of funny."

And then what? "It was a pretty normal night," she says. "Matt was there, we just chilled out. I think we had a bit of ice cream and tried to find something to watch on TV. Nothing's too different in a moment like that. Maybe you feel a

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ELLYSE PERRY

little bit more content with what happened and with what you've done as an athlete but you're no different a person from one day to the next, regardless of what you've done on the pitch."

She's trying desperately hard to play it down. She's turning red. She's staring at the table. She's accepting of compliments but she's not sure how to respond.

"It was a huge thrill and wonderful to be part of that Ashes Test but the contentment with the accomplishment doesn't last very long," she says. "It was a memorable and enjoyable day. It's something I feel very fortunate to have done but it's not the highlight of my career. No way. The team highlights are the bigger and better highlights. The team successes I've been lucky enough to be involved in, in terms of winning World Cups, winning the Big Bash last year, playing in some really big Ashes series, they're a lot more memorable. To celebrate a shared

achievement with your teammates and your friends, nothing beats that."

She's polite. She's embarrassed by attention but knows she has to cop it. She seems sincerely oblivious to the fact she's already an all-time great Australian athlete. Which helps make her an all-time great Australian athlete. Oh, to make 'em all this humble. She's unassuming and self-deprecating. Oh no, she says during the photo-shoot. Have I got a milkshake moustache? She seems completely unaffected by a phenomenal sporting journey that began

boundaries than those marked by a rope.

Thwump, thwump, thwump. Twenty-six fours. One six. Her most heartfelt words at North Sydney Oval were these: "More than anything, what's been the biggest thrill has been the people who've come to this match and the atmosphere that's been created. The people just enjoying their cricket ... and the amount of young kids who've been hanging round for autographs late into the night. That, for me, has been the biggest thrill I've ever had in my career."

Those same kids might've put their heads on their pillows that night and seen Perry batting. Which might've made them want to go to the nets the following morning. Which is the point of all this. Young girls with flying ponytails and six-stitchers in their hands. Cut-down Kookaburra bats.

Perry speaks affectionately about the girl who was playing cricket and soccer for Australia as a teenager as if we're talking about a different person.

"It was a fantastic thing for a kid to go through. I think," she says. "It certainly shaped me as a person and as an athlete who's really passionate about what I'm doing now but looking back, I guess I don't quite comprehend why it happened. It feels like I was just really fortunate. I know that's a bit of a throwaway line but there's no other real way for me to explain it to you. I think I was lucky, I really do. I think I was just in the right place at the right time."

when she was chosen for Test cricket as a 16-year-old from Pymble Ladies College who said at the time: "It's a big part of Aussie culture and I don't see why girls can't play it!"

The tomboy became Australia's youngest ever Test cricketer. She's still the only Australian athlete to have represented the country in both soccer and cricket. She scored a freakish long-range goal for the Matildas off her left foot at the 2011 World Cup in Germany. To have an Ashes double ton and a World Cup goal on your resume ... that's never going to be matched. But it goes beyond that for SIGNIFICANCE. The tomboy has played the most important innings in women's Test history, right when Cricket Australia gambled on a high-profile day-night Test for the female flannelled fools, right when the entire cricketing world was sitting in judgment, right when the sport needed someone to stand tall and push more

derful sport. It's been a big part of my life. There's some wonderful people involved in it too. I miss it but I don't feel like I'm missing out, if that makes sense? I'm really comfortable with where everything's at."

She adds: "When I was playing both, I never really spent much

time thinking about which one I'd choose. It wasn't like that. I tried to go with the flow a bit. There was no point worrying about different scenarios for the future. It sounds blasé, but I just let things evolve. Sport changes from day to day. It wasn't touch-and-go between one sport or the other. It's such a fickle

industry and it was just how things naturally evolved. With what's happened around both sports, but particularly cricket, it's a full-time career for people now, the game's going to whole new levels, there's so many opportunities — to be a part of Australian cricket and to be able to focus on it full-time as a

professional athlete, I can't complain about how it's turned out."

Ever think you could still be playing both? "To be honest, I watch the Matildas now and think I'd be so far off the pace," Perry says. "I'm like everyone else. I'm just a general fan who loves to watch them. I played with Sam Kerr a lot. I know a lot of those girls. To see how they've all developed, I really admire that. They're world-class athletes. To see what they're doing at the moment, to see how far they've come and to see they're genuine contenders for a World Cup in a couple of years' time, it's pretty unprecedented for soccer in this country. I'm looking on with awe, more than anything."

Three-hundred-and-seventy-four balls were faced at North Sydney Oval. Three-hundred-and-seventy-four opportunities for the tomboy to tell herself the words she mumbles whenever a bowler approaches the crease. Watch the ball. Make smart decisions. They're the words the tomboy will mouth when she captains the Sydney Sixers' title defence in WBBL III from today. The same words the tomboy will tell herself at the SCG or MCG if Cricket Australia goes through with its plan to promote major venues at the 2020 World Cup. The same words the tomboy still says at the Hassell Park nets after she's asked her father the quintessential summertime question that's been on her lips for the last two decades. Can we go down to the nets?

"My very first memory of cricket is of my dad showing my brother how to bowl in our house one night," says the most influential female cricketer of her generation. "And me walking up and wanting to learn as well. Then there's memories of my first club matches for the team I played with, and all the boys on the team."

"And I always remember Dad throwing me balls down at the nets. You know the nice thing about that? We still go down there and do it."

CONGRATULATIONS TO TAG HEUER AMBASSADOR CRISTIANO RONALDO FOR YET ANOTHER ACHIEVEMENT!

AQUARACER CALIBRE 5

The Test captain we can take at face value

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becoming like that in any case, as I believe flying into a rage every time things go wrong is just the type of approach guaranteed to get you offside with most of your teammates, who look to you, as captain for calmness and leadership rather than senseless anger," he wrote. "I tried to remain upbeat in my body language but things did occasionally get the better of me on the field from time to time with the odd shout or gesture of

frustration here and there when things went wrong. I just couldn't help myself.

"I can say now, looking back, that I learnt about the art of captaincy..."

Smith's honesty was, in no small part, the reason Australian cricket navigated itself with minimal damage out of the situation when the side lost five consecutive Test matches. Captains are usually briefed ahead of press conferences on what questions they will be asked and encouraged to be ready

with a reply. After discussing things with his manager, Smith decided to go bare back into the press conference in Hobart.

"I opted for the media conference equivalent of 'see ball, hit ball', simply responding as truthfully as I could to everything that was put to me," he wrote.

Smith strode into the room, his face wrought with disappointment and said, "I'm embarrassed to be sitting here". The Australian captain wouldn't last a minute in politics. He doesn't posture or position.

He isn't concerned with how things sound or look, he isn't perfect and he isn't afraid to admit it. He isn't leading the greatest Australian cricket team ever, it is probably not even a very good one just yet.

He is, however, in charge of a side that is 2-0 up in the Ashes. He is averaging over 60, he has scored 21 centuries and 21 half centuries. His batting, if it stays at this level, will see him ranked among the greatest ever. It's a thought that's sweet enough to put a smile on the most cynical of faces.

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CONGRATULATIONS TO TAG HEUER AMBASSADOR CRISTIANO RONALDO FOR YET ANOTHER ACHIEVEMENT!

AQUARACER CALIBRE 5

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