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PITCH PERFECT

Introduced by Sam Kerr

Did you know the early Matildas had to pay their own way to compete internationally?

That only 20 years ago the Matildas were so needy for sponsors they posed for a nude calendar?

Or that 30 years ago there was so much hostility to the idea of female footballers, that a man cut up his wife's boots to stop her from playing?

Over the past year the Matildas have lifted the Tournament of Nations trophy and defeated some of the powerhouses of world football.

The one-time underdogs of international football have their sights set on next month's Asian Cup to add to their growing trophy chest.

But as this week's **Australian Story** reveals, it's been a long hard road to fame.



Born out of the women's rights movements of the 1970s, the Matildas coming of age has coincided with the wave of 'girl power' sweeping the world.

Gone are the days when sponsors were so thin on the ground that players stripped off for a nude calendar, or paid their own way to compete in international tournaments.

The Matildas have gone from being 'circus freaks' to celebrity footballers. The current crop of players know how much they owe to previous generations who fought to play the game they love.

As they head off to the Asian Cup in a few weeks' time, the Matildas hope to continue their climb up the world rankings knowing they have the nation behind them.

*"It's great the kids know who the Matildas are. For me after 15 years being on the team it's still surreal to hear the girls and fans scream my name and whoever they idolize, so it's fantastic."* Matilda's co-captain, Lisa de Vanna

*"If I look at the Matildas now and how the public are receiving us, then it's worth all the sacrifices that myself and all the other players have gone through."* Former Matilda, Julie Dolan

*"Unfortunately, and probably still today, sex sells in a lot of women's sports, but the nude calendar was something that we thought at that time was needed to help us on our way."* Former Matilda, Cheryl Salisbury

*"It's something we're all really proud of to be role models because I know when I was growing up all my role models were male athletes, so it's really cool."* Sam Kerr, Matilda forward

Contact: Producer, Jennifer Feller, 0417 217 107

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For further information contact:

Peri Wilson, Communications Specialist, News and Current Affairs  
02 8333 2263/0409 888 866 or [Wilson.peri@abc.net.au](mailto:Wilson.peri@abc.net.au)