

# Home still bowls Ellyse over

On the eve of the first Women's Ashes Test double sports star Perry explains why she will always be a north shore girl

By Caroline Jumpertz

She has played cricket and soccer on the international stage since her teens but Ellyse Perry, 27, remains a north shore girl through and through.

Born and bred on the upper north shore, the world-class professional athlete has now made her home in Chatswood.

Perry is part of the Australian team taking on England in the first Women's Ashes day-night Test, starting today at North Sydney Oval.

"We've started really well," she said of the Women's Ashes series but added that the English team had "just won the World Cup, so they've got a bit of confidence about them".

At North Sydney Oval this week, Perry was all smiles as she spoke to the *North Shore Times*. But there is a quiet determination and focus beneath the surface that clearly drives her.

Over a decade in the increasingly career-oriented arena of women's cricket, she has witnessed – and indeed driven – seismic changes in the sport.

But rather than reflecting on career highlights, it's her deep and abiding connection with the north shore that she is keen to discuss.

Perry was born at Wahroonga's Sydney Adventist Hospital on November 3, 1990, to Kathy and Mark



From left Ellyse Perry at North Sydney Oval, in sports mode ahead of the Ashes series against England, with rugby player husband Matt Toomua and in her Pymble Ladies College days.

Perry, three years after her brother, Damien, who was influential during his sister's formative years.

"I always wanted to do the things he was doing and followed him around a lot," Perry said. "He played a lot of sport when we were younger so we played in the backyard a lot together and down at the local park."

"We were quite different and I think that's really been a great thing," Perry said of her relationship with Damien. "We've always had varied experiences but it's sport that tied us together."

The family lived in Wahroonga and West Pymble when Perry was growing up and her parents made sure she and Damien could pursue their passions – which were mainly sport-oriented.

"Mum and Dad drove us around parts of Sydney – and other states, for that matter – to do different things," Perry said.

"They'd always make time for us. They were pleased to

## Yes, she's human ... where Perry is not elite

While Ellyse Perry absolutely loves music and going to gigs she confesses that she cannot sing or dance very well. And while Australian Olympic swimmer Susie O'Neill was her sporting hero when she was growing up, Perry cannot emulate her idol in the least.

"I love swimming but I'm not very good at it, I'm also terrible at netball. I had a go at that in Year 12 – and I was really bad at that."

So, what else has Perry stomped? "I learned the drums up at Turramurra for a while but I was absolutely hideous at it," she said. "Oh, and I'm terrible with technology."

While Perry's travel and cricket schedule does not

allow for much extra-curricular activity, she and husband Matt Toomua have shared an interest and a financial investment in a couple of cafes in Canberra for the past few years.

"We've both got a big interest in coffee and the hospitality side of things," she said.

Perry has also teamed up with shadow writer Sherryl Clark to work on a series of books for children because she said she really wanted "to put together something for young girls that are really interested in sport."

"I had a lot of fun doing that," Perry says of the Ellyse Perry titles *Packet Rocket*, *Winning Touch*, *Double Time* and *Magic Feet*.

see me enjoy doing something so much, so they always went out of their way to make sure I could do it."

Perry, who is now opening a bowling and batting in the middle order for the Australian team, went to high school at Pymble Ladies College (PLC) where she was well liked by teachers and students alike, according to principal Vicki Waters.

"She was outgoing but also very humble both inside and outside of the classroom and quietly managed the balance between school and sport," Waters said.

Perry said: "I absolutely loved school life."

"Obviously sport was something that kept a lot of my attention but one of the best things about Pymble was that there were so many

opportunities to do so many various things and to see others do really well."

Growing up on the north shore, Perry credits the opportunities she had in her childhood as well as the strength of the community sporting clubs with helping to make her who she is today.

"Now I'm living a little bit closer to the city but still on

the north side of Sydney, which was something I really wanted to do.

"I just really love the attitude of people on the north shore."

"They're always really active, getting out and doing things but also really proud of their local community."

As a girl, Perry would cut loose from her disciplined sports regimen – but usually to do more sport.

"I probably jumped on my BMX and went down to the park, went roller blading and all those kinds of sporty things," Perry said.

Or else she would visit Gordon Library with her mum.

Nowadays, she likes going to see live bands and often sees acts she has never heard of. Her most recent gig was to see former Powderfinger frontman Bernard Fanning. She will video chat husband Matt Toomua each morning.

Perry married Toomua at the end of 2014 and when her

season's cricket commitments wrap up in April she will head to England, where he is currently based, playing rugby union for the Leicester Tigers.

For both of them sport comes first for now. And Perry celebrated her 27th birthday this month by playing a cricket match.

"The realisation hit her at age 16 that she could play sport professionally and make a career of it."

"After that first experience, when I had my first tour with the Australian team, with cricket, and then quite fortunately not long after had the same experience with soccer, it really was the biggest highlight of my life," she said.

When she said "not long after" it was literally a matter of two weeks after her international cricket debut that Perry debuted for the Matildas in an Olympic qualifying soccer match.

"I felt so comfortable and so invigorated by the whole experience that I knew I wanted to do it lots more times if it was possible, so that's where I was conscious of doing everything I could to be involved," she said.

Perry is known for her meticulous preparation but said she had learned from other players, too.

"Like the challenge of trying to do better every day at training. I like doing things repetitiously. I get a kick out of perfecting the skills," she said. "Certainly, I've learned a lot from the players that are a bit more relaxed in their approach and maybe vice-versa."

Perry is quick to recognise current efforts by well resourced codes such as the AFL to fast-track women's involvement at sport.

"It's been great to be part of that development and evolution but challenging as well," she said.

"I really feel there's been no better time to be a female athlete."

Perry will spend a month in India early next year but, no matter where she is, she is always connected to this little patch of the planet.

"I think about the green, leafy suburbs and the quietness of a lot of those streets and the really nice local shops and great cafes," she said. "Whenever I'm flying in or out of Sydney, I try and spot the north shore from the plane."