

SHIRLEY PLOOG - AUSTRALIAN LACROSSE CHAMPION

Shirley Ploog first played lacrosse at the age of 17 in her final year at Wilderness School in 1976. After one season with the school, she joined the Adelaide University Lacrosse Club in 1977, where she developed into one of Australia's leading players during the 1980s.



Adelaide University proved to be instrumental in Shirley's development. At a time when opportunities for women to train alongside men were uncommon, she regularly trained with the club's men's players. Under the guidance of coach Peter Koshnitsky, she developed the ability to catch, pass, shoot and dodge with equal confidence on both her left and right sides. This ambidextrous style became one of the defining features of her game and was widely recognised by teammates and international opponents alike.

Shirley's rise through the representative ranks was rapid. She represented South Australia in the senior women's state team from 1977 – 1983 and 1988. Her performances at the Australian championships earned selection in the tournament All Star team in both 1981 and 1982, identifying her as one of the outstanding players in the national competition.

Her domestic performances led to selection in the Australian team to face the touring United States side in 1981. The following year she was selected for Australia's team to compete at the inaugural IFWLA Women's World Cup in Nottingham, England.



Shirley speaking with the father of Beris Johnson. At one point in the game she slid on the grass and landed on the concrete edging, causing the cut on her face.

The 1982 tournament established Shirley Ploog as one of the world's leading players. Australia progressed to the final against the United States after an undefeated minor round and outstanding tournament, and held a 6–1 lead at half-time before the Americans recovered to level the scores at the end of the match, 7–7, resulting in extra time being played with the US eventually winning 10–7.

Although Australia narrowly missed the inaugural world title, Shirley's individual performances throughout the tournament received the highest recognition. She was named the tournament's Most Valuable Player, becoming the first recipient of the award at a Women's World Championship.



1982 Australian players selected: Shirley Ploog (MVP); Colleen McVeigh, Margaret Barlow, Sue Mellis and Mary Pickett (All World Team)

Following the 1982 World Cup, there were no All World Teams selected until the 2005 World Cup, and no tournament Most Valuable Players selected until the 2022 World Cup, making Shirley one of only three Women's World Championship MVPs selected to date.

Shirley remained an integral member of the Australian team throughout the decade. She represented Australia against Scotland in 1983 before returning for the second IFWLA Women's World Cup in Philadelphia in 1986. Australia defeated the United States in the final to claim its first Women's World Cup, with Shirley a member of the championship-winning team.

She again represented Australia at the 1989 IFWLA Women's World Cup in Perth, completing a representative career that spanned the first three Women's World Cups.

In addition to her international success, Shirley was recognised within South Australia as the state's leading player when she won the South Australian Women's Lacrosse Association A Grade Best and Fairest Award in 1982 and was also a finalist in the South Australian Caltex Sports Star Awards in that same year.

A newspaper profile published in 1983 described her as "the best in the world" following her performances at the inaugural World Cup. In the same interview, Shirley reflected that she had taken up lacrosse because it offered a completely different challenge to the sports she had previously played and spoke of the increased attention she received from opposition teams following her international recognition.

Beyond her playing achievements, Shirley also became involved in advocating for improved player safety. During 1983 she joined other leading women's players in calling for the introduction of protective helmets following concerns about head injuries in the sport.

Prior to the 1989 World Cup, Shirley relocated to Victoria, where she continued to compete at the highest level, playing club lacrosse initially with Newport before later joining Caulfield and represented Victoria in the senior women's state team in 1989, 1991, 1992, 1996 and 1998, serving as vice-captain in 1991.

Injuries started to plague Shirley's career, with an Achilles injury affecting her preparation for the 1989 World Cup, with an ACL a decade later marking the end of her lacrosse career, but the beginning of a new career.

To Shirley this was a blessing as she went back to her other passion – Art. She is now a [full-time artist](#) and based in Barwon Heads on the Bellarine Peninsula in Victoria.

CAREER ACHIEVEMENTS

- Represented Australia in six senior international campaigns:
 - 1981 – United States touring team
 - **1982 – IFWLA Women's World Cup (Silver Medal)**
 - ***Most Valuable Player***
 - 1983 – Scotland touring team
 - **1986 – IFWLA Women's World Cup (Gold Medal)**
 - **1989 – IFWLA Women's World Cup (Bronze Medal)**
- South Australian senior women's state team 1977–83, & 1988.
- Victorian senior women's state team 1989-91 (Vice-Capt), 92-96-98.
- National championship tournament All Star team in 1981 & 1982.
- SAWLAA Grade Competition Best and Fairest (1982).
- Finalist, South Australian Caltex Sports Star Award (1982).
- Inducted into South Australian Sport Hall of Fame as member of S.A. women's lacrosse team between 1985 and 1995

SHIRLEY'S BEST LACROSSE MEMORIES

My great memories – I definitely want to acknowledge Adelaide Uni Lacrosse Club and my coach at the time Peter Koschnitsky. They were ahead of their time. I consistently trained with the men; I even played a men's game. I played left and right-handed which was not done by many women in those days and I wore a helmet. Very controversial but enabled me to be the player I was. Playing both hands was a skill that hadn't been recognised as a benefit to dodging in the early days. I started with a wooden stick but soon as I could I switched to plastic which made it easier to play both hands. Seems so crazy to think of that now. I think I'd love the sticks the girls have today!

One of the things that was special, a memory that came back whilst over in Japan for the 2026 World Cup, was at the end of World Cup tournaments we had a dinner where World Cup teams would be announced. It also became a singing competition. All the countries sang and of course the Aussies would sing old favourites like Waltzing Matilda. The funny thing was the Welshies, Scots and English were sooooo much better than us at singing lol!

Melli (Sue Sofarnos) organised a song book for our tours, so we knew the words to our anthem as well as all the other songs. It was very funny and always we were singing on the bus to and from games.

It is hard to pick the best/toughest teammates and opponents. English defenders were tough in their day. I can't remember her surname, her nickname was Mo I think and tall, strong and tough.

Jen Williams was a tough competitor, she could read the game and had good pace through the midfield along with Colleen Hunter. Margaret Barlow was a great competitor and solid through the midfield. Clearly was a great leader in D.

It is such a different game now and the girls' skills and fitness are far superior to our time.

TESTIMONIALS

PETER KOSHITSKY (Former S.A. and Australian coach)

I coached Shirley at Adelaide University Lacrosse Club from the start of her playing the game at her first year at Uni in 1977 and at state level for the next six years and again in 1988 when she played a big role in S.A. winning a very tough championship against Victoria in Perth.

When Shirley started playing, Australia had never won a single game of international women's lacrosse. She loved the game with great dedication and also with humour leading all her Uni, state and national team members in enjoying fun always. She was tireless, fast and dynamic in attack. She was a pioneer player in Australia to use the then new plastic sticks and especially led Australia and the world to revolutionise the way women's lacrosse was played with plastic sticks and two-handed play, dodging and scoring.

Her performance at the inaugural Women's world cup played in Nottingham, England, was exceptional. In spite of not all our best players at the time being available for this tournament, Shirley top scored in most games that saw Australia dominate and undefeated going into the final against the US, which after Australia led 6-1 at half time, the US managed to tie and win in overtime.

After she starred throughout the whole tournament, Shirley was named MVP for this inaugural world championship – so dominant was she in this tournament. This was a big surprise in the traditional women's lacrosse world because of Australia's previous performances with no wins. In 1986 Shirley then was an experienced forward and key attack member of the Australian team that won Australia's first world championship, defeating the US in the final in Pennsylvania, US, undefeated into that final.

MARY PICKETT (Former Australian team mate and ALHOF inductee 2025)

I was very fortunate to play with Shirley in several SA state lacrosse teams in the 80s and also in four Australian teams, including two World Cup teams (1982 and 1986) and two Australian teams for home tests (1981 - v USA and 1983 v Scotland).

Shirley burst onto the local scene in the late 70s and was an early adopter of the plastic lacrosse stick. She also trained and controversially played with the University men's team where under greater pressure she honed her unique skills. Her style of play was aggressive, but her elite level of skills enabled Shirley to effectively trail blaze playing both hands, utilising a strong split dodge, a deadly left hand shot and feed as well as with her natural right hand and an uncanny knack of gathering ground balls in contested situations.

Shirley was often the top scorer for SA and Australia, and, in the 1982 inaugural World Cup Shirley had scored 14 goals by the end of the minor round (plus 1 in the final) and was clearly the standout player of the tournament and her selection as the World Cup MVP was clearly justified.

In 1986, Shirley was selected in the Australian team to contest the second World Cup and again she was a key player. Despite being marked very closely she again played very strongly and helped Australia to win all minor round matches and then defeat the USA in the gold medal match.

Her skill level was unmatched at the time and greatly admired by her team mates as well as feared by the opposition. Shirley trained tirelessly and set a high benchmark both individually and as a highly regarded team member.

JEN WILLIAMS (Former Australian team mate)

I first met Shirl as part of the 1980 State team where we were both in the team for the first time. She was working very hard with Peter Koshnitsky (her club coach) to be a champion and her drive combined with a wonderful sense of fun and care for others made her not only a brilliant teammate but a friend for life.

In 1981 we trialled for the Aussie team and were both selected for the first time. It was the most exhausting process finishing with a 12-minute run on an almost 40 degree day. Her level of excitement made the whole experience so much better. In the first match of the 5-test series Shirl & I both started on the bench as subs but made it onto the field for the second half. From that moment Shirl was always an integral part of any team with whom she played. Her infectious nature and great people skills added so much more than just lacrosse skills.

As an opponent, Shirl was tough to mark. She was one of the first women to use a plastic stick and very early in her career became genuinely ambidextrous with her stick. She was quick and playing other sports such as Touch footy (State team 85) helped her hone great dodging skills. It was of no surprise that after being named in

the 1982 Championship team in Adelaide that she went on to be a star in the very first world cup, winning a silver & a trophy for her performance. Shirl would have been a unicorn at that tournament being a two-sided dodging player that had speed and good defensive skills.

After 81 Shirl was in the Aussie team in 83, 86 as a world champion, and 89 completing a gold silver & bronze set. She was in S.A. championship teams in 1982 and 1988. From 89 onward Shirl was lost to the Vics. She had moved to follow love and lacrosse combined. What a wonderful life direction but we really missed her.

Shirl's ability to get on with others, make life fun and put her smarts to use on and off the field combined with her exceptional skill level made her an invaluable teammate. She is a gem of a person and a game changer in the sport.