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Transcript of an interview with
Jaime Page

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JAIME PAGE TRANSCRIPT – GAME CHANGERS COLLECTION

INTRO [LUIA]: *Welcome to GAME CHANGERS, a podcast about trailblazing West Australian women and their contribution to the wonderful game of soccer. This collection was produced and developed by the Centre for Stories and the State Library of Western Australia. Together, we are sharing stories that reflect our state's rich heritage, diversity and history.*

The interviews you're about to hear were recorded on Whadjuk Noongar boodjar, and we pay our respects to their elders, traditional custodians, and knowledge-keepers, who are the first storytellers of this place.

In the lead up to Perth hosting some of the games for one of the world's largest sporting tournaments, the FIFA Women's World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023, we hear stories from local women who rose up against inequality and stereotypes to champion the game of soccer as far back as the 1970s.

We hear from elite athletes past and present considered to be the best in the game, both locally and globally; and we hear from the community role models who are courageously making soccer more accessible and equitable for future generations of women, young girls and newcomers of all genders to the game.

Sports media journalist Kris Marano sat down and heard why self-belief, sacrifice and strength is what it takes to become champions of soccer. In today's episode, Kris talks to Jaime Page, a player and committee member for the South Perth Pride Football Club, an inclusive soccer club for players of all different backgrounds, races, ages, abilities and sexualities. The club was founded to address a clear lack of inclusivity in the game in Perth and works to help members of the LGBTQI+ community get back into soccer. Enjoy.

KRIS: What was it like growing up in England as a kid?

JAIME: It was fantastic. I mean, my earliest memories of England are literally two things, rain and football, and ice rings if you include mud. It was a glorious time. It's the swinging sixties and we had a large family, and they just lived that sixties lifestyle. It was great. You know, we would watch the Beatles and the Stones on television. We'd watch the football. It was all exciting. Everything was fresh and new. You know, typically England, it was dark and gray a lot of the time, but that was lovely too. And I guess my earliest memories of England are sliding around in the mud. It was great fun taking a ball. I used to take my little ball over the park, over the field, should I say.

We lived in a place called Tilbury, which was a dock town southeast of London. We had a beautiful muddy field and you just want to get yourself totally caked in mud and kick around the ball and pretend that you were playing for West Ham, being an East end, sort of a locality. And I would come home on those rainy, awful days and mum would sit me in the sink and try and cake the mud off me.

We had a big family, but I didn't have any brothers or sisters, sadly. But I had lots of uncles and aunties. Huge, great. A wonderful group of people that just used, used to love life. My grandfather used to run a working men's club, it was great. We used to watch everybody dance and we used to get bands in there and we used to sit down the front of the stage, watching all the bands as they used to come through and dancing, getting all excited about rolling around in the mud that weekend. And then you'd go back to the club and sit in the ladies' room with my nana and wait for a match of the day at 10 o'clock. That was every weekend. That's how we lived. That's what we did.

I guess I must have been around three or four when I just took a natural shine to the ball and I was probably brainwashed by one of my elder uncles who was football mad. So, I used to literally go over the field, run up and down, up and down till no one could stand it anymore. And that was what made me happy. Then I'd go home and draw pictures. I'd have a collection of different teams, shirts from all the different teams, you know, I was a fan of all teams.

Yeah, it was just a beautiful, beautiful thing to sit there drawing pictures of me as a soccer player. I even changed my name on my birth certificate to one of the West Ham strikers, who was very famous, which was Jeff Hirst, who scored the hat-trick in the 1966 World Cup. He was my hero. And my uncle and my dad used to take me up to see West Ham and I used to sit on their shoulders in the crazy crowds often to be carried down to the front of the pitch 'cause it was too dangerous. I remember sitting on the policeman's shoulders down on the touch line, watching, I'm sure it must have been Manchester United, seeing Bobby Charlton and all those heroes. You know, it was just a wonderful, wonderful thing, you know, to hear the roar of the crowd and see that. Looking back, that was probably as, as we moved on out of that locality, 'cause we did, we moved to Africa when I was seven and everything sort of changed again and it was a whole new life.

KRIS: What did soccer look like and feel like in Africa? Was that at the time when you were the captain of the team at school?

JAIME: It was okay. I mean, it was a different climate obviously, so it was a lot hotter, but I was still at the time, still football mad. And I used to be one of the ringleaders to get everyone out on the field at lunchtime, and we would kick about for as long as we could. That's all we ever did, you know. When I would go home from school, I would sit there and kick a ball against the wall. We spent about four and a half, five years in Central Africa. During that period, I went to boarding school for a year because it was a little bit difficult to get schooling where we lived. And that's where I became captain of the soccer team. And I think I was also, I might have captained the cricket team at some point, or one of the cricket teams. Oddly enough, one of the reasons that I left boarding school is because they were converting to rugby. So, us younger kids, you know, when I was 10 or 11 were play would play soccer. Then when you got older, you play rugby. And that was a deal breaker for me. So I said, no, I won't do that! So, I went back to a local school in the country that we lived, which was a place called Zambia. We lived in a city called Kiwi, and I missed the bus to go back to boarding school deliberately. Sort of half deliberately, and it was a Freudian slip of sorts. And I went back to the local school and I was pretty much the only white kid in the school at that point. And that, that was life changing. It was different, but it was great and, you

know, I just never imagined any sort of divide in terms of race or color. I just sort of tried to fit in there with them. And that's when I was first introduced to guitars, oddly enough.

KRIS: So that's where you learned to play guitar.

JAIME: That's where I learned to play guitar. A couple of my school friends were just obsessed with guitars as much as I was obsessed with football. Yeah. It's been an amazing, amazing life. You know, I've had lots of good things happen musically. Lots of wonderful things have happened. Worked with some great people I mean, the ultimate thing that's happened to me through all that was I've actually had a song that I share co-writing with Brian May from Queen. Which was a bit of a minor hit for Brian. And to make that more exciting for me anyway, was the fact that when Brian May was touring the song, he basically used my song in Bohemian Rhapsody as a mashup and did a medley of my song and a drummer I used to work with who was playing with him, his drums. You know, so I cannot wish for a greater thing to happen to have heard my song mixed with one of the great rock-and-roll songs ever written, greatest rock and rock songs ever written. That's another pinch yourself moment. And I did, I spent five years in England through the eighties, just really trying really hard to break through but at the end of the day, my vulnerabilities were too great at the time, and I went through a period of serious destabilization and a nervous breakdown because of it. And it was sort of recognized by those around me that I wasn't strong enough for that lifestyle, which I wasn't.

And I guess for me growing up, being that I also had the other situation going on as an undercurrent of knowing that my gender identity was not all it would seem, which is something that had happened as long as I'd actually been playing soccer. I knew that there was an issue with who I was. From as long as I can remember from that same period, from being very young. That's why I didn't want to play rugby, whereas I felt soccer was a much more acceptable game for me. It felt right. And the music to me at the same time fit very much with everything I'd grown up with anyway. And I just wanted to be a rockstar. And so, I guess my focus went from wanting to be a football hero and play for West Ham to being a rockstar.

And I continued playing soccer when we came to Australia in 1974. I would've been 13 or 14 and I played for Wireless City for a few years. But I was struggling more and more with my sense of identity and who I was. And it got harder and harder to play soccer as the other kids were growing. I wasn't. My body was developing differently cause they all hit puberty. Things were weird. I remember coming off the field crying one day because you know, I didn't have the strength of all the other kids, I just didn't, and I didn't understand why. And I just remember crying to mum and dad going, I don't know what's wrong with me. Is it my legs? Is it my body? Something is wrong. Something is just not right. And eventually I drifted, temporarily drifted away from soccer and put all my energy into being the rockstar I wanted to be. And that became a focus of my life for many, many, many years after. Even though I loved to watch soccer, I loved to kick a ball around over the park. I was too scared to play in teams anymore with older people. It just wasn't, wasn't happening for me.

Then eventually many years later through my dad, through someone at my dad's work, he sort of mentioned that his boss played for a soccer team in Gosnells. Maybe I'd like to go down and have a crack? Which was Gosnells City at the time. I was a lot older by then, so I was playing veterans soccer with them, and that's when the differences really hit home next. I would feel so out of place. Literally when we had to get changed or whatever, I'd be embarrassed and sitting in the corner going, oh my God, what am I doing here? And when we had to get changed after I'd get showered, I would refuse to

go in the showers and I'd just wait till everyone had left, you know, I'd sneak in there and do my own thing.

One of the great days we had was we had a mixed match as a friendly, and I got to play with some ladies and it was like, I'd come home. It was like, this is so much better. This feels right. And through that period I was slowly starting to come to terms with my life and who I was. And it was a very long, difficult process with much self-loathing and internalized transphobia and denial. The only thing that really stopped me from playing was I did my ACL training for Gosnells, and I still played on with a broken ACL for six or 70 years before I got it fixed. That was my determination. I would go out there, my leg would fall apart, I'd spend weeks of rehab. Eventually, after a third opinion on my knee, they said that the ACL was gone. So, I had an operation, but I could never come back. I could never get the fitness to play at that time. So that, from there, that really led to the transition; the transitional phase of my life where I sort of looked at myself and was honest with myself and said, look, this is who you are. You have to live your truth. You cannot not be, no matter what the cost, whether it cost you your job, which it indirectly did cost my job, whether it cost me my musical career, which arguably you could say it did or did not; but I thought you have to know what it's like to live your truth. You have to. And so I literally started over from nothing, with no job. My musical career went down the tubes temporarily, and I had to work back from that. Which was a huge thing to do. You know, you need just a ridiculous, crazy amount of resilience to do that. But all the way through that, I used to drive past the local, I used to drive past game fields where there'd be teams playing and I'd be so incredibly sad that I couldn't do that. I love the game. We used to watch it all the time. I never had stopped supporting the game through all of those years, almost to a point of being obsessed. And I thought damn it, there's gotta be someone, there's gotta be an LGBT-something out there where I can do [this], where I can fit in and be comfortable. That's where I found South Perth.

KRIS: When you were driving by some of those fields, soccer pitches, you said you'd feel a lot of fear. Like, what was the fear there of what could happen if you walked into one of those clubs or...?

JAIME: I knew that I'd get laughed at. I knew that everyone, and you know, it's still an issue if you, even if you, even today, you know, when you're at the club rooms, you know you're safe amongst your LGBTI colleagues, teammates, but there's always a sense that they're sort of laughing at you while taking the mickey out of you from behind your back. So, you are always worried about the rejection. You would worry about people not wanting to play against you because of who you are. It was just a fear of rejection.

KRIS: Would you get comments or...?

JAIME: There was always laughter, there always is. You cannot go out on any given day without getting someone looking at you from whether approving eye. That's just the way it is, which just never ends... But, you know, society's getting better and the acceptance is much better. And that's one of the beautiful things about what we can do. But Perth pride at South Perth is, you know, we can empower, we do empower people to be able to live their truths and play the game they love at the same time. And that you don't have to give it away. You don't have to suffer that sort of sacrifice to be who you are. It's okay to be who you are and go out and kick a ball and do what you love.

KRIS: How wonderful.

JAIME: It is. And they're just a wonderful group of people and incredibly supportive and, you know, they're paving, in my opinion, they're paving the way for a lot of wellbeing within the community. You know, because a lot of us suffer trauma through this whole process. And to have a place where you can undo some of that trauma and feel good about yourself is a wonderful thing.

KRIS: So, as you've shared your story, you know, I'm just thinking for someone who doesn't understand what it's like to be a trans woman... how can we help them understand what your experience is like? So, if you, even like, when you're talking about coming out, and you know, how you were feeling, like how do we help people understand what it feels like?

JAIME: Imagine that you're a square peg in a round hole. You don't fit and you want to fit. That's what it feels like to be me. That's what it felt like to me to be a trans person, was to find somewhere that you fit and felt good being you. The gender spectrum is quite wide. Not everybody falls under the same... we are not just all one or all the other. Some of us will sort of, you know, like a non-binary person, will be somewhere in the middle of that gender spectrum. A trans woman like me is someone who is reasonably perceived and medically perceived to be one way, but was actually not that. And yeah, in my case, you know, hormonally and otherwise, there was other issues going on too. So yeah, technically I could have even been described as intersex, which makes it even harder. Not, maybe not harder, but more difficult for people to understand. But if you've got characteristics of both genders, it can be hard to have someone empathise with that. But I think to realize that we're just, we are just human beings who want to live and love and be normal, do things like everyone else, and not feel that we're the subject of someone's joke. That, you know, we are treated with the respect that we deserve. We are good, kind, normal, everyday people just like everyone else. And everyone deserves that respect. Everyone.

KRIS: Yeah, can you tell us more about South Perth Pride, the team and how it was started and what's the atmosphere like and how do you feel when you join everyone for a game every week?

JAIME: It's wonderful. I mean, I joined it literally by doing Google search, trying to find an LGBTI soccer team anywhere. I don't know what made me do it, but it was just..

KRIS: Was that your search?

JAIME: That was it. Yeah. Just to try and find something. And I sent them a message to, sent the message through to South Perth and they were very quick to get back to me and say, actually, funnily enough, we've got this team. And they hooked me up with Declan and Andy, the two coaches, the people who ran the team, and I went down there. I think it felt immediately at home, I was happy to help them out as much as much as I could. And after the game, we would always sit down in the clubhouse and they would put on a great spread of food and we'd sit there just having a drink and enjoying each other's company, which we still do consistently today. We always go back to that club room and every time you leave, you give everyone a hug. That's the sort of feeling that everyone is so, so warm and friendly. It's just unbelievable. They all care about each other. There's no judgment. And everyone looks forward to it. You know, if we can bring some younger kids through, that's great. If it's older people that want to come out and keep fit and healthy, that's great.

The youngest, I think, was around about 15. And the oldest is me, obviously. The rest of them are a different generation to me now. I'm by far the oldest by probably 20-odd years. But you know, they love

to go clubbing. They love to... doing all the things that younger kids do, whereas I'm more of a boring homebody when I'm not playing music.

KRIS: You've said though, that you've become, would you say a bit of a role model or maybe a mentor to the younger players?

JAIME: You try to be, you hope that you are, and you try and teach them what you've learned or you try and encourage them. You just try and pick them up and they fall down. You know, you show them techniques, you show them how to play the game if they even need it. Some of them are pretty good anyway. But if someone gets hurt, you'll be the first person there to pick them up. And, you know, if they are wavering or struggling, that's when you really need to be encouraging to make sure that if they're not coming to training 'cause they're depressed or they're maybe feeling something worse that, you know, the team will encourage them out of their shells. Just super important for our community. This is a tendency for a lot of us to sort of become hermits and just live in our own little bubbles. The team manages to explode that bubble.

KRIS: What has joining the team given you in your life? Or how has it shaped your life?

JAIME: It's given me a lot of self-confidence. It's improved my health to no end because, you know, keeping fit is the healthiest thing you can do for your mind as well. So, you know, you walk away feeling a million dollars when you walk away. Even me being as old as I am, I still love that feeling of just hard running and getting involved. There's no pressure, you know, there's no competitive edge to it.

KRIS: So, what position do you play?

JAIME: Yep. I sort of move around a bit, but they largely put me as a striker. But yeah. I often will pull right back and defend a lot too. Even at my old age. I'm up and down and all over the place if I have to be.

KRIS: The league itself, what's the setup of playing and games and what's the length of the season?

JAIME: For us it's much more difficult because we're a mixed team. So, we have gay, lesbian, trans, non-binary members and that doesn't fit well into any format unfortunately. So, the only outlet we have for reasonably competitive games is to organize some friendlies with existing, usually ladies' teams. It's always the ladies who use us as cannon fodder to get fit for their seasons. So that's all we can really do, which is something that we do honestly miss.

KRIS: Is that something you would like to influence and change, to be able to create a league or...?

JAIME: I mean, you know, we lose a lot of players to the ladies teams or we feed them and the ladies teams will train with us 'cause we train on the off season as well. So, we have a huge influx of South Perth ladies come train with us during the off season, which is great. We've had some players that have played at, you know, relatively high levels that are really skilled to come through at times, which is wonderful too. So ideally the plan for us is to hopefully get more friendlys with other pride teams. I know that there's a team in, I think in Busselton maybe, or Bunbury, that we could look at. A couple of our members flew over for Sydney World Pride and took part in the soccer tournament that they had over there, which was fantastic for them. We couldn't get the whole team there, which we would've

loved to have done, because the time and the expense was just too great. Those are the things that we'll be looking at. Literally trying to grow the involvement of the LGBT community within our team to the point where it'd be great if we inspire other clubs to have Pride teams as well, which would be even better in, who knows, maybe there's, with time and a bit of investment, in time and maybe some funding from somewhere, that we could have a little Pride league. That would be amazing.

KRIS: Yeah. I know through Fremantle City Football Club, that they're looking to this season do a bit of a pride round. Perth Glory did its first Pride round this season and there was a lot of great support.

JAIME: Yeah. And it's just getting better and better.

KRIS: With the Women's World Cup coming especially happening in Perth, what will it, you know, what could it mean for the pride community? Or what would you like to see happen for the pride community?

JAIME: Yeah. I think it's raising such great awareness for the sport in general, but specifically for the women's game to be respected to a level that it's deserved. And I think for a lot of people to be able to accept the Women's World Cup is something special, will hopefully lead to greater acceptance across the board. I would hope, I know that I'm sure, that there's a reasonable amount of gay players within the women's game and I think that is really helpful. 'Cause I think the support piece there is wonderful. I think accepting that it's not just a man's game is a wonderful, huge step forward. It's just a joy to see how far women's football has come in such a short, relatively short time in terms of profile. It's just amazing. Now, was it last night or the night before, there were 60,000 people that watched the Arsenal Women's team in the championship league semi-final, which is just miraculous.

KRIS: Yeah. Very exciting.

JAIME: And it is just gonna do wonders, wonders for the sport, it's gonna do wonders for the kids who aspire to be like the heroes that they're no doubt going to find. There's gonna be a lot of incredible role models coming through some of the teams coming through, which is sensational.

KRIS: What kind of legacy [does] that leave behind for women and girls or women and girls who are even going to play soccer for the first time?

JAIME: Showing them that there's a pathway, a pathway to success that's valid, is a wonderful thing. You know, I remember when I was younger, you know, when we would coach young teams with girls, there was less of a pathway and they would gradually, often would sort of lose interest or drift away. But hopefully the retention of the girls and ladies will be much greater. That there'll be a pathway to a career for them as well. Which we're seeing, we've seen some incredible Australians having wonderful, wonderful careers. So hopefully it's gonna inspire more people to follow that path, to live that dream and have it be a valid dream. That it's a reality, that can become a reality.

KRIS: Yeah. I've been asking everyone this question, kind of at the end of the interview. We're talking about football and we're talking about sport, but what does it mean to you to be a woman today?

JAIME: That's a great question, especially for me! 'Cause sometimes I have to shake myself up and look back at my life and go, my God, you, you managed to live your reality. You made your dream of who you really were a reality. And every morning I'd probably get up and pinch myself and go, my God, you did it.

You just, you actually did it. You had the guts and the strength to be exactly who you want to be. And, you know, I have to admit, I feel, what's the, I feel humbled to even have a remote opportunity to be considered as a woman in that climate. I take it very seriously and I understand the honor that that is to be treated as who I am. It's just an unbelievable feeling. It's unbelievably empowering and I'll be forever humble and respectful of the kindness that so many people have shown me, to allow me to thrive in that, in that role.

KRIS: When you look back on that time, like you said the word resilience. Where do you think that courage came from?

JAIME: I think, to be honest, I always had an element of feeling like I could do anything, even when I couldn't, from when I was a little kid. You know, if I thought I could fly, I would believe it that was who I was. You know, if I wanted something bad enough, wanted to do something, I would find a way. Even if I wasn't any good at it, even if I sucked, I would. And it still goes the same with me today with everything I do, whether it's with work or whether it's with play or with music or whatever, I'll just keep hammering away at a problem until it doesn't become a problem and that is where my resilience comes from. You know, I mean, it's like that little five-year-old covered in mud who thought they could play for West Ham, probably far from the, totally far from the truth. But in my own mind, that was the reality. That's what I believed, and nothing was going to shake that. And that's still me today.

KRIS: Yeah. What a wonderful feeling to believe in yourself.

JAIME: It's a great feeling. You have your moments of weakness when people will try and take your belief away from you. They'll try and undermine you in some way to make you feel worse about what you're doing or here you are. And especially as you are successful in any particular field, there's gonna be a hundred million people who are quite happy to say they could have done it better and they should be doing what you're doing. And having to learn how to cope with that criticism or that level of negativity to what you are doing, and still rise above that and stay strong to follow your path is, I think has been my biggest challenge. And I think I've sort of done okay to get this far need to be, to be surviving and doing what I love at my age. Bearing in mind, I'm 62. And I don't feel a day over 30 still.

KRIS: Yeah, you look amazing.

JAIME: But physically I feel that way. You know, I don't feel intimidated about anything when I go on the field. You know, I can run and chase and do all the things I would love to do.

KRIS: Be yourself.

JAIME: Be myself. Honestly, when I was younger, I thought, well, if you want, you know, if you want success, you're gonna have to sacrifice a lot of things that are you and I have lived that way for many years and I realize that it is actually possible to be exactly who you are and still do what you love. You don't have to trade things off. Now, I don't know where that came from in my head, but it was there. And you know, I think that's the greatest thing I can draw out of my life is that you can pick up all the pieces and put them back together and be stronger.

And don't let people grind you down. Just stay strong. That's the best advice I would ever have to me as a 12, 13-year-old who was struggling and sitting in the bedroom crying, worrying about who they were

and wanting to literally disappear from the face of the planet. 'Cause you felt you were worthless. I would go back and say to that crying little me just to suck it in. Be strong. You've got this, you can do this, it's not as bad. Nothing is ever as bad as you make it. You can, you can do it. That's the bottom line is that everything you do in life, it's up to you. You have a choice. You can let people grind you down or you can overcome and rise above it. That's my choice to rise above it.

KRIS: Do you have any final messages that you'd like to share?

JAIME: Yeah. Well, for me, I feel intensely honoured to even be considered for this. I couldn't believe it when they put my name forward and I was going, no, no, no. This is, you know, I'm not good enough again. And I had to get over that and go, nope. You need to walk tall, stand up straight, and just feel that you are good enough. And even at this late stage in my life, I feel that by being a part of this and doing this, that I've done that. And I hope that future generations will gather something from the strength and resilience of my experience and go on to great things. I hope, I would dearly love for someone who's listening to this now, to actually go on to great heights and do something fantastic. That would be the ultimate. And I know it's in them. I know that they can do it. They've just gotta want it and do it and believe and go for it. Grab it with both hands.

OUTRO: *Thank you for listening. This podcast was produced by the Centre for Stories. It was developed in conjunction with and funded by the State Library of Western Australia. Our organisations believe in storytelling as a way to build more inclusive communities. Head to slwa.wa.gov.au to listen to the rest of this oral history collection, or head to centreforstories.com to learn more about our storytelling services and mission. Special thanks to our production team, script editor and executive producer Luisa Mitchell – that's me – producer and interviewer Kris Marano, and audio engineer Mason Vellios. Thank you.*