



The Unstoppables profiles

Norfarahana ('Ana') Aziz (Malaysia)

If it was not for rugby, Norfarahana Aziz would not have left home for Kuala Lumpur. Despite a meteoric rise, she became an international within two months of switching her focus from the martial art of Silat Olahraga, Ana sacrificed much. But life in the city brought her into contact with new cultures and has given her the confidence that any obstacle can be overcome. "Even if I have a big problem and I want to give up, I won't give up."

Nahid Biyarjomandi (Iran)

For Iran Rugby's Head of Women's Rugby Development Nahid Biyarjomandi the sport is never far from her mind. She admits to assessing the suitability for rugby of people who pass her on the street. "My family say: 'Stop thinking about rugby!'" but it is that passion that convinced Nahid to start the first women's club in Iran and has helped her grow the female game in the Asian country from just two players to it being played in 20 of 31 provinces.

Rebecca Clough (Australia)

Wallerroos veteran Rebecca Clough has crammed a lot into her 12 years in rugby, playing at three Women's Rugby World Cups and travelling the globe. But as someone who first underwent surgery as a baby, injuries have taken a toll. Indeed, although rugby was always a passion, she only started playing once she gave up netball and handball on medical advice. Injuries have remained a constant but rugby has always shone a light at the end of the tunnel.

Maëlle Filopon (France)

France centre Maëlle Filopon has overcome adversity to fulfil her dreams. Initially her foster mother's fear that she would break her nose kept her from the rugby pitch but having convinced them to let her play, a hereditary hearing condition threatened her passion. Maëlle cannot hear the whistle so has had to develop visual cues to stay on the referee's right side. She has thrived since, scoring a try as France beat New Zealand in 2018.

Deborah Griffin (England)

Returning to England in the 1970s Deborah Griffin "didn't know rugby at all", but she quickly realised that it could be used as a vehicle to encourage women to play sport. She has since devoted her life to the game, co-founding the Women's Rugby Football Union in 1983, playing a vital role in organising the inaugural Women's Rugby World Cup eight years later and earning her place on the RFU Council, England Rugby Board and World Rugby Council.

Leah Lyons (Ireland)

Ireland prop Leah Lyons has been involved in rugby since, as a young girl, her father handed her and her twin brother identical scrum caps and told them to simply, 'go play'. Her passion was fuelled further as her father helped to set up Fermoy Lionesses when she was 13. Rugby has given Leah the confidence and strength she needed to deal with unkind comments on and off the pitch and in turn inspire others by showing that rugby is a sport for all.

Saskia ('Kiki') Morgan (USA)

As a teenager Kiki Morgan would skip to the last page of each book she read to check it contained a happy ending. If it did not she would put it down, so affected was she by the death of her mother. The sport that lifted her out of that routine, while at Brown University, was rugby. "I had this feeling inside me again of everything I thought I'd lost." Kiki adapted quickly and has since grasped opportunities for travel she never thought possible.

Litia Naiqato (Fiji)

Waisele Serevi's feats at Rugby World Cup Sevens 1997 sparked a lifelong dream inside Litia Naiqato to play rugby for Fiji, but her path to the international game has not been an easy one. Initially a promising soccer player, the decision to swap a round ball for an oval one meant rising at 4am and running an hour through the mountains just to catch the bus to training. Her dedication paid off, last year she emulated her hero by captaining Fiji.

Lucky Nirere (Uganda)

If anyone is born to play and coach rugby it is Lucky Nirere. Her mother, Fortunate Irankunda, was in the midst of a 13-year career in the Uganda front-row when she became pregnant and Lucky was only two when she first picked up an oval ball. By the time she was four years old Lucky had begun coaching her peers at primary school and she has now worked with more than 50 coaches, all of whom are still involved with the game. Lucky is only 12 now.

Anna Preira (Senegal)

The development of women's rugby in Senegal can be traced through Anna Preira. Having fled rebellion in Casamance as a baby she encountered the game via her mother, who worked as a cleaner in the French military base in Dakar. The pair founded the country's first women's team, the Amazons, in 2006 and through the sport Anna found a vocation. She was a member of the inaugural Senegal women's team and now sits on the federation's medical committee.

Sweta Shahi (India)

India sevens player Sweta Shahi had never heard of rugby when she was spotted at an athletics meet. Attracted to the sport by the risk of contact, Sweta scoured the internet for video tutorials. But a lack of coaching in her village was not the only obstacle she had to scale. While her father was very supportive, her uncle was less impressed asking 'Who will marry you?'. It is such perceptions of women that Sweta is determined to undermine.

Bianca Silva (Brazil)

Bianca Silva discovered rugby aged 11 when she was encouraged to attend a Rugby Para Todos (Rugby for All) session in Paraisópolis, Sao Paulo's biggest favela. She began playing for Leoas, finding a way to express herself on the pitch that has helped to provide for her family off it. Bianca's progress was rapid as she made her debut on the HSBC World Rugby Women's Sevens Series in 2015 and starred at Rugby World Cup Sevens 2018.

Leidy Soto (Colombia)

Growing up in Castile, a neighbourhood "perceived as very dangerous", Leidy Soto dreamed of escaping. Rugby has been her salvation, providing the means to do just that while also helping her change the perception of women that pervades Colombia, and her family. Leidy has proved to those closest that rugby is not just a "men's thing" as she has excelled for her country, gaining confidence, medals and her family's support along the way.

Stacey Waaka (New Zealand)

Stacey Waaka feared her rugby career was over before it had even begun. The Black Ferns star was a promising netball and touch player when, aged 15, the school bus she was travelling on was shunted from behind. Her quick thinking helped limit casualties, but she worried the lacerations on her legs, still visible today, would curtail her sporting ambitions. Instead, Stacey took up rugby and won both the sevens and 15s World Cups by the age of 22.

Xiaojing (Phoenix) XU (China)

Phoenix Xu has high hopes for her refereeing career. Having been introduced to rugby while playing soccer at university, she was enrolled on an officiating course almost three years after graduating. On day one of the course she resolved to plot a path that would lead her to the Olympic Games. Along the journey, which has taken her around the globe, she is determined to encourage more Chinese girls to pick up both a rugby ball and a whistle.