



TALES OF TWO

JULIE DOLAN & PAUL CHAPMAN

A passion for soccer united former Matilda, Julie Dolan, and school principal, Paul Chapman.

WORDS TARA WELLS

At Paul Chapman's computer classes more than a decade ago, he tried to make spreadsheets more scintillating for his adult students by including data like 'Messi – goal. Chapman – assist.' To those well versed in football, this puts Paul Chapman, the founder and principal of Central Coast Sports College alongside one of the world's best players, Argentinian Lionel Messi. Data entry is indeed fun but unbeknown to Paul, in his class sat one of Australia's soccer greats: Julie Dolan AM.

Debuting for Australia at aged 14 and, four years later, in 1979, becoming the captain of the Matildas, Julie says, 'I thought at the time, this guy will never be a comedian. But he was very, very good at teaching.' Quiet about her own football expertise, it took Julie's mother – an occasional class attendee – to quietly suggest to Paul that he Google her daughter.

When he did, Paul says he almost fell off his chair because Julie had played 34 matches for Australia, including the first Women's World Cup in 1988. And not one but two significant football awards bear the central midfielder's name: the Julie Dolan Medal for best female footballer of the year, and the A-League's annual Dolan Warren Awards (Julie's pioneering role is honoured alongside player Johnny Warren).

'From that day, after each [teaching] session, I'd often stay back and we'd have a conversation,' says Paul.

The topic, perhaps inevitably, became soccer. Or more specifically, Paul's crazy idea: to start a new sports school specialising in football. Based on a successful French school's model, professional coaches would run the sports program separate from the teaching staff. Paul

knew schools; he was also a high school teacher and had jumped through bureaucratic hoops during another school's registration, but he was not connected with the football world.

Julie was immediately keen to be involved. 'I said to him, that is the best thing I've heard in 30 years of football. And, boom, we started working on it.'

Julie not only validated Paul's idea but also brought valuable industry connections. Paul describes those early days as Julie introducing 'Mr Nobody with an idea' to the CEO of Football Australia at Socceroos' games. By the time they began skills clinics to encourage registrations for the new sports school, Paul could see his faith in Julie was well-founded. 'It was almost like a kindred spirit. She fully bought into trying to get this thing across the line. And she demonstrated through her work with the coaches that she was so well respected.'

As for Julie, she could see there was more to Paul than a pipe dream. 'He was very methodical, a dedicated and very earnest individual.' He listened, learned and, finally, launched. Julie came on board at the school's opening in 2013 as Technical Director of the football program and for the last five years has been Head of Marketing.

Still making spreadsheets fun, here's some data to enter: kicking off with a cohort of 76 students in Years 5-10, the school now has around 800 enrolments from Kindergarten to Year 12. Students specialise in football as well as tennis, netball, rugby league or union, basketball and dance. Chapman – goal. Dolan – assist. **C**

Watch *Trailblazers*, documenting the Matildas' rise and featuring Julie Dolan, on Stan.