**February 2023**

**Lainee Harrison**

1. How old are you and what are you currently studying?

I am 19 years old, and I am currently in my second year of studying Nuclear Medicine at the University of Newcastle.

1. What sports have you been involved with and with which clubs?

I’ve been playing Football since I was 4 years old, and the clubs I’ve been involved in were: Brindabella blues, All abilities, Monaro Panthers, Lake Macquarie Rosters, Wallsend Devils, and Rutherford dragons.

In Athletics, the clubs I have been involved in were: ACT little Athletics, Maitland little Athletics and Macquarie Hunter Little Athletics Club.

1. What made you change sports from athletics to Cerebral Palsy football?

I originally played football from aged 4, as I grew up in a football family and my parents met through football, plus all my sisters played football. Throughout my whole childhood I played football. When I was involved with the Cerebral Palsy Alliance Football Camps in Narrabeen under the expertise of Chris Pine who was an ex Pararoos player, I learnt a lot about football and he really helped me feel confident in playing with Cerebral Palsy.

 I was informed at one of these camps that ParaFootball was taken out of the Paralympics and representing Australia at the Paralympics was an ultimate goal for me. As well as this, there was no pathway for females with CP to pursue football at a professional level. So I decided to change sport to athletics at aged 12 to help me reach this goal. I give all my credit to Shaun Fletcher who coached me throughout my athletics career and for helping me improve my long jump distances and overall speed. However, because of my recent injury of a bilateral stress fracture in my spine, I was out for 18 months. This was ultimately caused from long jump so I have decided that I am no longer going to pursue athletics and put all my focus into football Especially with the World Cup coming up later this year.

1. How was the experience of competing in the 2022 IFCPF World Cup with the ParaMatildas?

It was unreal! I struggled a lot with my stress fracture as I played the whole World Cup campaign with it unknowingly but with all the adrenaline, I felt the pain wasn’t really there until I sat on the airplane going home. I couldn’t ask for anything more than sharing my first international appearance with a bunch of awesome players and girls. I will be forever grateful for being able to play football at international level which I always dreamed. Scoring 5 goals was so important to me as leading into the World Cup not knowing what was going to happen was scary and being able to place second at the World Cup was everything you could ask for and more .I’m so proud of how far the Paramatildas have come from the last World Cup to now.

1. What are some of your future goals?

I’m hoping to play at the World Cup again this year, and then in the future play football at the Paralympics [when it is an event there].

1. What advice would you give to other young people wanting to give Para Sport a go?

It would be to put yourself out there and give sport a chance because para sports has evolved so much in the past 10 years, and hopefully in the future you can make a career out of it or find a sport that you’ll love for life. You can also meet so many people who have similar abilities to you and grow into an individual who has confidence in their ability and isn’t afraid of being judged.