

JENNY WILLIAMS – AUSTRALIAN LACROSSE CHAMPION

Jenny Williams is one of Australia's most accomplished and influential women's lacrosse players. She represented Australia as a player and coach, was a member of Australia's 1986 World Cup-winning team and coached Australia to a World Cup silver medal in 1997. Her career combined exceptional athletic ability with sustained excellence, leadership, innovation and an unwavering commitment to team success.



Jenny was an outstanding multi-sport athlete representing Australia in Lacrosse and touch football and earning state honours in soccer, cricket and Australian Rules football. Lacrosse became her greatest sporting contribution. She was inducted into the South Australian Sport Hall of Fame in 2013 as an individual athlete, but was also recognised as a key member of the South Australian Women's Lacrosse Team of 1985-1995 that was inducted into the South Australian Sport Hall of Fame in 2018 for winning eleven consecutive National Championships.

Her influence extended beyond her own playing achievements through her leadership, coaching, strategic game innovation and the development of players and cohesive teams. She challenged accepted conventions, introduced new approaches to playing and coaching, and helped shape the evolution of women's lacrosse in South Australia and Australia.

EARLY CAREER AND THE FORMATION OF COLLEGE LACROSSE CLUB

Unlike most elite lacrosse players, Jenny did not begin playing until she was 19. She was introduced to lacrosse while studying a Physical Education teaching degree at the Adelaide College of Advanced Education (ACAE), in a lacrosse unit taught by former Australian representative Jean Bain.

Jenny began playing at Seacombe Lacrosse Club in 1977 and quickly demonstrated the athleticism, speed and game sense that would become hallmarks of her career. She won the club's B Grade Best and Fairest in each of her first two seasons playing socially before progressing to A Grade in 1979.

In 1980, Jenny established the ACAE 'College' Lacrosse Club consisting of Physical Education students, teachers and athletes from other sports, all who were new to lacrosse. Jenny was awarded the SAWLAA Grade Best and Fairest in the Club's inaugural season. In its second season, with Jenny's targeted recruitment, a strengthened College team won the League premiership. Under Jenny's captain-coach leadership, College developed into one of South Australia's most successful women's lacrosse clubs.

The importance of the 'College' Club extended beyond its own premiership record. Through Jenny's commitment to developing athletes from outside the traditional junior lacrosse pathway, 15 of the 40 South Australian representative players selected during the state's 11 consecutive National Championship victories (1985 to 1995) came from College. Nine of these players went on to represent Australia.

STATE AND INTERNATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Jenny's rise to representative lacrosse was remarkably rapid. In 1981, she was selected in her first South Australian senior team and named in the All-Star Team at the National Championships. Later that year she was selected to represent Australia against the touring United States team, helping secure a landmark 5–3 victory over a team that had never previously been defeated. She played for South Australia for 15 seasons and became a central figure in the team's sustained national dominance. Her leadership, competitiveness and ability to influence games from the centre made her one of the defining players of the 1985-1995 South Australian era.

At international level, Jenny established herself as one of Australia's leading players. She was a member of Australia's World Cup gold-medal team in 1986 and bronze-medal team in 1989, and captained Australia during her later representative career. Her ability to combine on-field athleticism and game sense with inspirational team leadership made her a highly influential international player.

Her outstanding individual performance came in 1986, when she was named Player of the National Championships after being judged best on ground in every match. She then completed an extraordinary treble that season by winning the League premiership with College, the National Championship with South Australia and the World Cup with Australia.

Jenny's leadership was not confined to playing. Appointed Australian Head Coach in 1995, she guided Australia to the 1997 World Cup silver medal. Australia defeated all seven countries in the preliminary rounds, narrowly losing to the United States in a double-overtime final.

Her transition from elite player to international coach demonstrated the depth of her understanding of the game and of team dynamics. She was able to translate the knowledge gained through her own playing & coaching into a philosophy centred on care, effort, improvement, teamwork and enjoyment.



Lydia Thompson and Jenny Williams holding the World Cup after the 1986 win

INNOVATION AND INFLUENCE

Jenny's significance to lacrosse extends beyond her record of championships and representative honours. She was an innovator who was prepared to question established methods and develop new approaches to the game.

She became a highly skilled ambidextrous player who championed two-handed play at a time when this was unusual. She pioneered the left-handed centre draw, giving her an important technical advantage and influencing the way the centre position was played. Her speed, agility and ability to read the game allowed her to combine individual skill with a sophisticated understanding of transition, team defence and attacking structure.

She was equally willing to challenge established practices away from the field. Working with fellow players, coaches and administrators, she supported progressive rule changes and advocated for improved player safety, including the introduction of the option for women to wear protective helmets.

Her approach to leadership was grounded in a strong belief that team success should take precedence over individual recognition. At College, Jenny deliberately avoided creating an internal best-and-fairest culture, preferring to celebrate collective achievements. The same philosophy informed her State and Australian teams and her coaching.

For Jenny, developing people was as important as winning games. Her ability to build trust, establish high standards, encourage improvement and promote enjoyment helped create teams that were successful while also fostering strong bonds and enduring friendships. This combination of competitive excellence and genuine investment in others became a defining feature of her influence.

CAREER ACHIEVEMENTS

- Australian National Team player 1981-83-85-88-89-90-92 (captain 1989-90-92)
 - Gold medal, 1986 World Cup
 - Bronze medal, 1989 World Cup
- Australian Team coach, 1997 World Cup (silver medal)
- South Australian State Team 1981-1996 (except 1993) (captain 1982, 85-95)
- National Championships All Star Team 1981-82-84-85-86-87-88-89-90-91-92-94
- National Championships Tournament MVP 1986 (best on ground every match)
- 10x State League Premierships 1981-83, 85-87, 89 (with AULC), 92-94
- SAWLA Best and Fairest 1980 & 1984; Most Valuable Player 1994
- League All Star Team 1988-89-90-91-92-93-94-95 (player); 1990-91-93-94 (coach)

- 1991 SA Sports Team of the Year
- 2000 Australia Sports Medal
- 2013 Inducted into SA Sports Hall of Fame as an individual
- 2018 Inducted into SA Sports Hall of Fame as a member of SA Women's state team that won 11 consecutive national championships from 1985-1995
- 2018 Marg Ralston Golden Door Award (For contribution to Women's Sport)

LEGACY

Jenny Williams's contribution to Australian women's lacrosse cannot be measured solely by championships, medals or individual awards. Her playing record places her among Australia's elite, but it is her broader influence as innovator, leader and developer of people, that distinguishes her career.

TESTIMONIALS

PETER KOSHITSKY (*Coached Jenny at South Australian, SASI and Australian level*)

Lacrosse was very fortunate to have such a great athlete in Jenny playing our game. Jenny was the toughest most competitive athlete I have ever interacted with. She was a dynamic leader of any team she was in.

Jenny controlled centre against every opposition, especially being the first player in developing the left-handed draw. She was also a dynamic two-handed dodger, a prolific scorer and assister, and a great individual and team defender. Most significantly, Jenny was a confident and determined leader who consistently led by example. She played a critical role in SA's 11 consecutive National Championships, was a vital centre in Australia's first World Cup victory, and later coached Australia to a silver medal in 1997. A top, truly world class winner and leader

BETSY WILLIAMS DOUGHERTY (*U.S. team 1984–93 & U.S. Lacrosse Hall of Fame*)

I had the privilege of competing against Jen in 1986 and 1989 World Cup tournaments. Through those experiences, I witnessed first-hand her lacrosse prowess as a gritty competitor and dynamic player. While she was obviously skilled in the fundamentals of the game, her most impressive strength was how she brought her team together in spirit and camaraderie. She raised the level of her teammates' play through her sheer will. Her influence on Australian lacrosse is outstanding and everlasting. Jen is a fine ambassador for the sport and her country.

WENDY WALSH (*Australian team 1989-93-97*)

I have known Jen for too many years to count but without a doubt she was the most influential coach I have had. Her commitment to the team, and disciplined approach helped every player grow and improve. She has an incredible ability to motivate and support while always challenging us to become the best version of ourselves, both as athletes and as people. What truly sets Jen apart is her humility, passion and willingness to share that knowledge with others. She leads by example, sets the highest standards and creates an environment where everyone feels valued, supported and inspired to succeed. Her dedication to every player and the genuine care she showed us as individuals makes her not only an outstanding coach but also an incredible person.