There’s more to do

Rosser wields the willow and dons a footy jumper

By PETER ARGENT

PAT Rosser has just competed in his fourth Australian Country Cricket Championships (ACCC) with New South Wales. Cricket is his first passion, moving from Parkes in 2000 to play with the famous Sydney club St George, spending six years there, including four seasons in first grade. He was no slouch on the rugby league field. After playing grade cricket with St George, he received a one-year contract with the St George-Tillawarra Dragons in the National Rugby League (NRL). "The reason I went to the Sydney was for my cricket," Rosser, 32, a Wiradjuri man, said. "I suppose you’d call me a batting allrounder – my highest score was 123 in the first against Hawkesbury and best bowling was 4-40 against Penrith. "In 2006 I played rugby league for NSW Country against New Zealand in a trans-Tasman series and also played with a NSW Residents side in a State of Origin curtain-raiser at Elthad Stadium in Melbourne. "These were the catalysts to grabbing an N RL contract. "I had a season with the Dragons in the Premier League (reserve grade), but had a frustrating winter with injury issues over that year. "He had been at Parkes for the previous five years and this year is relocating the Kingscliff, in Northern New South Wales, where he will captain-coach the Cudgen Hornets rugby league team. "In football, he played four grand finals with Parkes, including two titles as captain-coach in the Group 11 competition. He also had stints in rugby league with the Western Suburbs Magpies and the Newtown Jets after playing with the Dragons. "Playing at the ACCC in Geelong in 2011-12, Bundaberg in 2012-13, Canberra last summer and Bendigo earlier this month, Rosser has enjoyed two thirds and a pair of third places. "He won selection in the Australian Country team in Bundaberg (2012-13) and played against the Queensland Bulls squad in a T20 match. "He has also worn the Blues colours for NSW in the Imparja Cup on five occasions, although timing precludes him from being involved in the 2015 event. "I had a hiatus from cricket while I was involved in rugby league at higher levels for a few years at the close the last decade," Rosser said. "One of the highlights was being involved in the back-to-back ACCC flags. It is a good quality of cricket and I was proud to me a member of those squads. "At the 2015 ACCC, Rosser’s best effort with the willow was an aggressive 61 against East Asia Pacific in a big opening partnership of 140 with Simon Moore. "With the ball, his best was 3-23 against Victorian Country. "ACCC winning teammate and former first-class cricketer Jeff Cook has been a mate of Rosser’s for a few years. "‘Pat is an aggressive batsman who we used at the top of the order in the shorter form games,’ Cook said. "He is an orthodox spinner and is a consistent bowler with good control. "On top of that and importantly, he’s a good fella."

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VANESSSA Stokes, 27, says there’s more she wants to achieve. "Catching bucket list is to play softball for Australia at the Olympic Games… but that might be a problem since softball is no longer an Olympic sport. "Stokes holds out hope that softball will be readmitted to the Olympics. "In the meantime, Australia’s first Indigenous international softball pitcher is firmly established in the Australian team and has built up a reservoir of international experience. "Originally from Alice Springs, her journey with softball started at the age of four with the Nightcliff Dragons in Darwin. She played in representative Northern Territory teams from primary school level through to open championships before moving to South Australia in her mid-teens. "I was first involved with the national team in a Test series against New Zealand in 2011," Stokes told the Koori Mail. "But my official international debut was against Japan in Canberra the next year. "I’ve now been to two World Cups and a pair of World championships. "The first champs were at Whitehorse, in the Canadian Yukon, and the second was in Amsterdam (Netherlands) earlier this year. "We collected a bronze medal in both events. "Our best performance in my time was the 2013 Canadian Cup, where we defeated the powerful USA side in the semifinal and were competitive against Japan in the decider. "The secret was we had changed our mindset against the big teams, especially the USA, who have a strong softball component in their university system. "A major strength of the Aussie Spirit team is we fight to the final pitch." The 183cm (6ft) pitcher sends the ball at the opposition batters as quickly as 110km/h. "She said one of the highlights of her domestic career was pitching South Australia to a national under 19 title in Brisbane in 2006. "On the final day of that tournament, Stokes pitched 14 innings in the semifinal and final to take the SA side to glory. "You know when you’re pitching at some speed because there is a cracking sound when the ball hits the catchers’ glove,” Stokes said. “Being tall and having long levers certainly helps my speed. “Naturally, I would love to win a World Championship for Australia. “I would love to go to the Olympics and we are hoping that softball gets reinstated for the 2020 Tokyo games. “I also like to have a good balance between my sport, my family and my heritage. “I’m keen to promote softball to young people in town and on the land.”

Uncle Michael Long

Her sporting heroes include national softball captain and 1996 and 2000 Olympic bronze medallist Kerry Dinello, her uncle, AFL football legend Michael Long, and her mum, Fiona Stokes. There is plenty of sporting ability through the family tree. Her father, Mark Turner played SANFL league football for the Sturt Football Club. Her first cousins on this side of the family are the McArdam trio of Greg, Gilbert and Adrian, who all played AFL football. On mum’s side, Vanessa’s first cousin Jake Long has just received his first opportunity on an AFL list. While there have been nine Indigenous players with the Aussie Spirit, including current captain and third base Stacey Porter, Stokes is the first Aboriginal softballer to pitch for her country. Continued strong performances and a World championships and getting the prized Olympic blazer are achievements Stokes desires before her playing days come to an end.