

# Young dreams come true as stars align



STEWART McLEAN

Champions Ash Barty and Evonne Goolagong Cawley surprise the kids at the Edmonton tennis club in Cairns on Wednesday

### Firm friends and fellow tennis stars catch up in Cairns

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It was a meeting Evonne Goolagong Cawley had been longing for since June.

The first indigenous woman to win Wimbledon was beyond delighted when Ash Barty, whom she first met as a 12-year-old, claimed the French Open in June and became world No 1 shortly after.

They have become firm friends in recent years and regularly flick each other text messages.

Given Barty's wonderful year, there has been much to discuss and celebrate.

But it was not until Wednesday, in Cairns, that Goolagong Cawley got the chance to say a heartfelt "well done" in person.

"I was really looking forward to this because I hadn't seen Ash in a long time," she said.

"There are a lot of other professional players out there but she is the second indigenous player to represent our country."

The setting for their meeting — a three-court complex in Edmonton — is far removed from the elegance of Roland Garros.

There is no shade, for a start. And the only dust was kicked up by a sugarcane train tracking

down the road on the other side of the courts. But it is a club where veteran coach Guy Thomas mentors a band of young hopefuls, including an indigenous squad.

All cite Barty as an inspiration.

Keiryn Lenoy is just one of the young indigenous talents who benefited from the mentorship of an idol.

As a teenager of significant promise from Innisfail, she received assistance from both The Evonne Goolagong Foundation and the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation, with the two groups funding a scholarship that allowed her to attend the prestigious Pymble Ladies' College in Sydney from 2008-10.

The 27-year-old is herself now

providing opportunities for indigenous kids, both as a Deadly Choices program officer in Cairns and as the director of a tennis program for young indigenous talent in the region.

"We are not a big city ... so it is really nice for Ash and Evonne to take the time to come up here and talk about their journeys and the support they got from their communities.

"The kids have two very special role models to look up to in the sense that they had the communities to support them and that they were encouraged to finish their school.

"As much as they wanted to be elite athletes, their parents encouraged them to stay in school to

have something else to lean on to."

Barty and Goolagong Cawley stressed to the young hopefuls the importance of loving their sport but also focusing on their education.

Barty said that she would treasure the excitement on the faces of the kids who greeted them on the Cairns courts.

"When you see that smile, that is what tennis is all about, that is what sport is all about and that is what family is all about," Barty said.

"Evonne was my role model when I was a 12-year-old and first met her and now these kids are lucky to be able to see her and learn from her, just as I did. This is incredible."