

She's a two-time world champion and one of the world's elite touch football players. Deadly like catches up with Bo de la Cruz to talk football, life and respect.

In sport, four years can be an eternity, and many sporting careers have sparked and then fizzled out in much less.

Back in 2002, a 22-year-old newcomer to the Australian women's touch football team named Bo de la Cruz blew the international competition away with her pace and playmaking skills at the World Cup in Japan. By the end of the tournament, she had been named Most Valuable Player.

Skip forward to 2007 and Bo was off to South Africa for her second World Cup, this time a more experienced and mature player. Her appearance in South Africa capped a tumultuous four years, and while Japan was all about the experience, South Africa was about proving herself.

"Some people say that I'm not the same player that I use to be," Bo says. "But then I have people say I've changed my game a lot and that I'm better because of it."

"I didn't know how to take that, but at the World Cup I just got stuck in there and really wanted to prove everybody wrong."

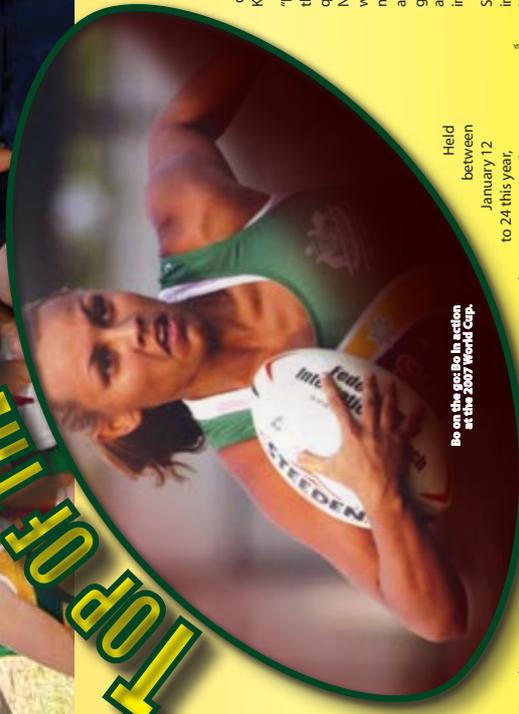
After Japan, Bo left behind family and friends in Darwin to further her footballing aspirations in Sydney. She went on to excel in both the Sydney competition as well as the country's top national tournaments before suffering a career-threatening injury. So for Bo, Australia's recent World Championship victory in South Africa was a major achievement and just reward for what she has overcome since her spectacular debut on the international stage.

"We were just so zoned into winning that game that nothing else mattered," Bo says. "Everyone was on the same level – no one was tired, no one had sore legs, everyone was just so focused. I think a lot of that was because a lot of the girls who I've played with for a long time were retiring after the tournament, as well as the fact that we're



Sweet Victory: The Australian Women's team with their hard-earned trophy.

TOP OF THE WORLD



Bo on the go: Bo in action at the 2007 World Cup.

Held between January 12 and 24 this year, the tournament took place in the town of Stellenbosch, located 60km outside of Cape Town on the West Coast of South Africa.

"South Africa was awesome," Bo says. "I had a great time there. Although it was a big culture shock for a lot of people, which I was

PHOTO COURTESY OF SPORTING IMAGES AUSTRALIA

"I've lost a lot more weight, and being lighter really does help. As you get older you've got to make the most of every year you've got left, and that's what I'm doing at the moment."

"I think when I was younger I took advantage of it too much. I thought, I don't need to be that fit because I've got natural ability, but eventually things begin to take a toll on your body."

For Bo, that realisation came at a heavy price due to fly out with the Australian squad to compete in the All Nations tournament in New Zealand, she suffered a serious injury to her right knee while playing for Western Suburbs.

"That was really tough," Bo admits. "And not having my family around me at the time made it a really hard load to carry."

While she was unable to play, Bo made the trip to support the team and was forced to watch from the sidelines as the Australians lost their first-ever match. For a person who had lived and breathed touch football for

actually expecting, it really makes you feel grateful to live in Australia."

Coming up against their arch rivals New Zealand in the Grand Final, the Australians exacted sweet revenge for their first-ever defeat, which came at the hands of the Kiwis in last year's All Nations tournament.

"I think at the All Nations last year we gave the Kiwis a bit of a sniff and they came out quite cocky," she says. "I didn't play in the All Nations because of my knee injury, but we were really fit and ready for them this year. I mean, we beat them 9-3 in the Grand Final, and again I think that's because a lot of the girls were retiring, and it was their last shot at getting them back, so we really got stuck into them."

Since the spectacular start to her international career, Bo has learned some hard lessons. This caused her to address the ways in which she approached and prepared for the game, both physically and mentally.

"Although I'm getting older, I'm getting a lot fitter, but that's because I'm having to work twice as hard as I used to," she says.

over a decade, not being able to compete was a debilitating blow.

"We only just lost in a drop-off 4-3," she says. "But to sit there and watch it happen when you want to be out there and knowing you could contribute? I wouldn't wish that on my worst enemy – it's the worst feeling ever."

"I was in and out of depression and wanting to go home. I hated the world. But then I heard about the Lance Armstrong book *It's Not About the Bike*. I started reading it, and to see what he has overcome made my injury look like nothing in comparison. It was really inspirational for me."

With the frustration of missing the All Nations providing plenty of motivation, Bo was back on the field playing in the Nationals with the Barbarians just five weeks after the second operation on her knee.

"It really pays off when you work hard for the team because they've really got your back when you need them the most," she says. "That's what happened with the Barbarians at the Nationals."

"My knee was pretty bad and swelling after every game, but the girls on either side of me on the field had my back the whole time – you couldn't ask for more."

Bo's passion for the game continues to grow. As well as success with the Barbarians, in 2006 Bo also helped her Sydney club side Western Suburbs into the Grand Final.

"I love it even more," she says. "You know, it kills me when I see people disrespect the game. I mean, if you watch the game at the top level it's amazing."

"The Australia women's open team is the most successful Australia women's sporting team in the world, so come on media and sponsors, give us a break! We've never lost a World Cup, we've never lost a series, we've only ever lost one game since Australia starting representing in touch!"

Now 26, Bo has no intention of leaving the game just yet. She has her sights set firmly on the 2011 World Cup in Scotland.

"You're only as old as you feel, and I feel great," she says. "I don't take life for granted any more, and as you get older you start to understand where people are coming from when they tell you to take advantage of your opportunities."

"I think I've matured in that way as a person and as an athlete, and still being the only Indigenous person in the Australian team makes me a role model for my people which is very important to me."



ACTIVITY 1: PREPARATION BEFORE READING

Bo de la Cruz is the only Indigenous player in the Australian women's touch football team. This report tells us about the influence she has had on the sport, particularly the World Cups held in Japan in 2002 and South Africa in 2007.

Earlier this year, she was part of the Australian team which won the World Cup against New Zealand 9-3.

Bo talks about the changes to her game as she has grown older – she is fitter and working very hard to stay competitive after a serious knee injury kept her out of the All Nations tournament in New Zealand in 2005.

While recovering from this injury, she read professional road racing cyclist Lance Armstrong's book *It's Not About the Bike* and was inspired by the way he dramatically overcame cancer.

Bo aims to compete in the 2011 World Cup in Scotland.

Read Top of the World on pages 12-13

1. According to this report, what year did Bo de la Cruz play touch football on an international level?

2. Where was the match played?

3. What award was given to Bo after that tournament?

4. In which country was the 2007 World Cup held?

5. Write two reasons that spurred Bo's team on to win the World Cup in 2007.



ACTIVITY 3: MORE ABOUT BO DE LA CRUZ

Bo de la Cruz—Department of Human Services

Indigenous Ambassador

Bo de la Cruz is a Department of Human Services' (DHS) Ambassador for Indigenous servicing. The Women's Touch Football champion talks face-to-face with communities about how service delivery can be improved and tailored to better meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Bo, one of six children, was born and raised in Darwin but now lives in Sydney. Her mother was born in Yorkshire, England and her father is from Innisfail, north Queensland. He is both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander with a Spanish and Filipino background.

Bo's outstanding football career started at the age of 12 and milestones include travelling to Japan in 2003 where the Australian team won the Touch Football World Cup. Bo was the star of the tournament, winning Overall Female Player of the series and Most Valuable Player for Australia.

2003 was a busy year for this young achiever. She was named Northern Territory's Sports Ambassador and Sports Young Achiever of the Year, was awarded Sportswoman of the Year at the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sports Awards as well as the National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) Sportsperson of the Year Award.

www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/publications/ind084.htm

1. What is Bo's role with the Department of Human Services?

2. Where was Bo born?

3. How old was Bo when she started her touch football career?

4. How do we know that Bo was the star of the 2003 Touch Football World Cup in Japan?



5. List 3 awards that Bo achieved in 2003.

6. Write two sentences below to explain why Bo de la Cruz is a good choice as Indigenous ambassador for DHS

ACTIVITY 4: SIMILARS AND OPPOSITES

In the box can be found a word that has the same meaning and one that has an opposite meaning to each word in the list.

You may need to use a dictionary to help.

For example: reckless - similar word = rash; opposite word = careful

courteous	coarse
cease	ferocious
enormous	recollect

polite	stop	rough
rude	forget	careful
smooth	cowardly	minute
brave	remember	commence
huge	rash	



ACTIVITY 4: WORD GAME

By moving from square to square in the grid, you will discover a word. You may move left, right, up, down, or diagonally. You must not jump any square.

six colours

B	L	E	P	I
M	A	U	N	K
V	U	E	Y	T
E	E	L	O	A
R	D	L	W	N