

Mary Konstantopoulos is the brains behind the blog Ladies Who League, an online forum for female fans' voices to be heard over the male-dominated noise surrounding rugby league. The Clayton Utz lawyer tells **KATE ALLMAN** how her website not only is empowering women in the sport and on boards – it's also just good chat.



Konstantopoulos (centre) with Parramatta Eels players (clockwise from bottom left): Peni Terepo, Junior Paulo, Cameron King, Manu Ma'u and Mitch Cornish.

## CRASH-TACKLING STEREOTYPES



Konstantopoulos having her face painted by Parramatta Eel Cody Nelson on her birthday.

**M**ary Konstantopoulos is a lawyer in a league of her own. The 27-year-old from the Clayton Utz corporate team has her own weekly podcast, is a sports writer for *The Roar*, sits on the National Rugby League (NRL) Women in League sub-committee, runs daily, and is a self-confessed “blue and gold” Parramatta Eels tragic.

Konstantopoulos is the NRL-obsessed blogger behind Ladies Who League – an online hub for women who, as the name suggests, enjoy rugby league. Much like ladies who lunch, these ladies come together to debate, discuss and share their passions – for NRL. But beyond the fluffy lunchtime gossip, this is a forum for important discussions that are helping women climb ladders, sit on boards, and coach and manage NRL teams around Australia. It's great chat.

“I still find it astounding that people have this misconception that either women are not interested in sport or that women's sport isn't particularly good to watch,” says Konstantopoulos.

“Women have strong voices and a lot to contribute to rugby league. We've got Raelene Castle as Chief Executive Officer at the Canterbury Bulldogs and a number of women on boards, including Marina Go as the Wests Tigers' Chairwoman.

“We've got female referees, and commentators like Yvonne Sampson and Erin Molan doing fantastic things on the sidelines. Women's presence is just going to continue to grow.”

NRL was a constant presence in Konstantopoulos's youth



Konstantopoulos, with pink ribbon in hair, joins fans to celebrate the second birthday party of Ladies Who League, at ANZ Stadium in Sydney.

growing up in Parramatta, 15 minutes from the blue-and-gold training ground of her beloved Eels.

Her father and two brothers loved sport and, if she wanted their company on weekends, she had to play it too. She played almost every sport – from basketball, netball and hockey to swimming and water polo. Although she never tried NRL, last year she won the NRL Supercoach fantasy league together with her colleague Lawrence Hastings. The pair beat 118,000 fans to win the \$30,000 prize, with the help of what could be the most ingenious use of Excel spreadsheets since Microsoft invented the program.

“There were a lot of spreadsheets,” admits Konstantopoulos. “We worked out how many points we were chasing and how we would make those points up. I did statistics on the competitor teams. It was a bit bananas.”

Also bananas are the statistics for Konstantopoulos’s website. The Ladies Who League blog – which she started writing in 2013 with encouragement from a senior lawyer who mentored her during her graduate year at Clayton Utz – clocks up to 150,000 reader clicks each month. The Twitter profile recorded 1.5 million Twitter impressions between January and March this year. The Saturday podcast, although still in its infancy with 16

episodes, has featured star sports journalists such as Tara Rushton and Yvonne Sampson, and attracts an audience of around 400 listeners.

“My ‘white whale’ is David Pocock,” jokes Konstantopoulos. “When he comes on my podcast, that’ll be it. I’ll know I’ve made it.”

Topics for discussion range from which NRL teams various *Game of Thrones* characters would support (Dothraki horsemen are obviously fans of the Brisbane Broncos), to fascinating and profound player biographies, to legal arguments surrounding an NRL player’s right to privacy in light of the Mitchell Pearce controversy earlier this year.

Although Konstantopoulos is no journalist (she has combined bachelor degrees in international studies and law from the University of Sydney), she has found the skills required for legal writing are similar to those necessary to write a successful blog post.

“When I was studying law at uni, I was the girl who would hand in her essay and anyone would be able to read it,” says Konstantopoulos.

“I’m really passionate about writing for an audience of everyday people on my blog. In the same way, it’s so important for lawyers to write and communicate in ways that will make the law accessible to everyone.”

The success of Ladies Who League has spawned the creation of a “Ladies Who” brand empire, which in 2015 launched a new website for female cricket fans called Ladies Who Legspin, with the support of Big Bash League cricket team Sydney Thunder. In May, the Greater Western Sydney Giants helped Konstantopoulos launch a third site for Australian Football League devotees – Ladies Who Leap.

Moving forward, does this blossoming media mogul intend to continue her career as a lady in law?

“I love the work at Clayton Utz, so the next stage for me is just learning as much as I can and building my network and becoming the best lawyer I can be,” says Konstantopoulos. “I will figure out what my next step is down the track.”

“I actually think that starting Ladies Who League has taught me a lot in my legal career. This is my baby and for it to be successful I had to work for it. Not only did I have to back myself, I had to start owning my achievements. I’ve worked really hard and I’m not afraid to tell people that now. Because the reality is, if you don’t back yourself, no one else will.” **LSJ**



[ladieswho.com.au](http://ladieswho.com.au)