

WTA scholarship

2023 winner of the National Sporting Organisation Scholarship – Women's Tennis Association (WTA) Katie Pirouet writes about her experiences working at the Adelaide International Tournament.



In January of this year, I had the honour of being selected as the recipient of the Massage & Myotherapy Australia National Sporting Organisation Scholarship – Women's Tennis Association (WTA). This provided me the opportunity to work at a WTA Tour Tournament. This incredible experience granted me the privilege of serving as a massage therapist at the 2024 Adelaide International Tournament, a pivotal event leading up to the Australian Open in Melbourne.

The WTA is one of the most recognisable and esteemed sporting organisations in the world, consisting of over 1,650 players representing approximately 85 nations. Originating in 1973 under the visionary leadership of Billie Jean King, the WTA has evolved into a global powerhouse, with more than 50 events and four Grand Slams across six continents and nearly 30 countries, setting the standard as the paramount force in women's professional sports.

The Scholarship immediately captivated me when I first came across it in the Massage & Myotherapy Australia eNews. Coming from

a family deeply entrenched in a love for tennis, where my dad coached us since childhood and weekends were spent at the local tennis club, this opportunity was too good to pass up.

My journey in sports, nurtured since childhood, transitioned into my professional life following the completion of my Advanced Diploma of Myotherapy at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) in 2002. Initially engaging with sporting clubs alongside my clinic commitments, I traversed through AFL footy clubs to local swimming clubs, eventually progressing to the Victorian Institute of Sport (VIS) and eventually Australian Swimming.

Touching down in Adelaide on the eve of the qualifiers, which commenced on 5 January at Memorial Drive, adjacent to Adelaide Oval, we were stationed in the women's training room beneath Adelaide Oval. Over the course of six days, I worked alongside another fellow massage therapist, as well as with six physiotherapists, a dietician, a podiatrist, a sports psychologist and two doctors. Working in the well-coordinated team, comprising of therapists with varying tenures and from all over the world operated like a finely tuned machine, was definitely one of the many highlights. Athletes received incredible support in a calming and fun environment that allowed them to reach their highest potential out on the court.

On top of my massage role in Adelaide, we had responsibilities such as stocking treatment rooms and locker rooms with towels and linen; cutting tape for various uses during matches; replenishing blister foam strips; and ensuring a ready supply of Powerade drinks with salt sachets for those extra hot days.

Adelaide can be subject to extreme weather conditions, in the face of potential extreme heat, our team diligently monitored the courts' heat readings three times a day. Using a specialised device measuring air temperature, court temperature, humidity, and the Wet Bulb Globe Temperature (WBGT), we ensured player safety by implementing changes if the WBGT exceeded 30.1°, offering relief from the heat stress.

Working on elite athletes at a sporting event

definitely proved very different compared to clinic-based work. The tournament was hard work and at times long hours. Some nights we were working into the early hours. The demanding nature of tennis led to mainly treating the athletes' backs, shoulders, hip flexors,



quadriceps, and calf and foot tightness and imbalances, and also many tight forearm muscles. In my eagerness to learn from many of the therapists I was lucky to work with, I witnessed diverse techniques and innovative approaches to treating shoulders and upper backs; as well as better and more effective ways to release hip flexors and rotator cuff muscles – enriching my skill set so my clients at home are now reaping the benefits of my time in Adelaide.

Applying for the WTA scholarship stirred initial nerves, especially after a hiatus from elite-level work to focus on raising my children. Yet, I viewed it as an opportunity to rekindle my passion, and I am immensely grateful to Massage & Myotherapy Australia for this chance. Special thanks to Sue and Anthony at WTA, whose guidance and support made this experience one of the more memorable

moments in my professional career. To my fellow team members and the players in Adelaide, thank you for making every second of my week unforgettable.

To anyone contemplating similar scholarships or opportunities in elite sports, I wholeheartedly encourage you to seize the chance – you won't regret it!

[Katie Pirouet, myotherapist. You can hear more about Katie's experiences in Massage & Myotherapy CONNECT Episode 76, available on the Association's website, Facebook page and YouTube channel.](#)