

‘She made me proud’: Goolagong Cawley hails Ash Barty’s Wimbledon win

‘This is her time,’ tennis legend says of ‘little sister’

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Tennis legend and Wiradjuri woman Evonne Goolagong Cawley has paid a heartfelt tribute to “little sister” Ash Barty, saying she just sensed it was “her time” to win Wimbledon during Naidoc week.

Barty’s nerve-wracking 6-3, 6-7 (4-7), 6-3 final victory over Czech Karolina Pliskova overnight came 10 years after she won the Wimbledon girls’ singles title at age 15 and exactly 50 years after Goolagong Cawley hoisted the Venus Rosewater Dish for the first time.

Video released on Sunday shows the moment Barty’s family erupted with joy in their living room on the Gold Coast when their daughter and sister converted match point.

In a poignant gesture to her Indigenous idol and mentor, Barty wore a Fila dress inspired by Goolagong’s 1971 Wimbledon outfit, designed by Ted Tinling who revolutionised tennis fashion, throughout her triumphant campaign.

“I hope I made Evonne proud,” Barty said during an emotional victory speech.

Goolagong Cawley left her in no doubt. “Oh she certainly did,” the former world No 1 said from her home on Queensland’s Sunshine Coast on Sunday. “She made me proud from the first time I saw Ash. She must have been about 13.

“She was playing at the Australian Open and [my husband] Roger and I stayed and watched for a bit and we saw one whole point where she showed all the skills.

“She did the slice, the volley, the smash. Everything in one game and we both just looked at each other and thought ‘oh, she’s got it, she’s going to be our next champion’. So look at her now.”

No Australian woman had won Wimbledon since Goolagong Cawley snared the title for a second time, then as a mother, in 1980.

Little wonder the 69-year-old said she choked up watching Barty's win, then the heartwarming victory speech, as the stars aligned so beautifully.

"Because everyone reacts differently when they win Wimbledon for the first time. It didn't hit me till later on because you actually turn numb. You're in shock, just as Ash was at the end there," Goolagong Cawley said.

"We were just so excited. Dreams do come true. I was just so chuffed when she wore that dress. I just said to her 'if it brings you, it brought me luck'. She's just amazing'.

"I'm just so much very, very proud with Ash and the way she handles herself. Not just on the court but off the court, too."

So amazing that the 2020 Young Australian of the Year has thrust herself into the front-running to join fellow tennis great Pat Rafter as a winner of the major gong this year.

"She's a great Australian. Everybody loves her," Goolagong Cawley said. "Every time I go out shopping everybody asks me about Ash. How's Ash going? Isn't she wonderful? Yes she is. Ash to me is like a little sister and part of my family. So I think we treat each other that way.

"It's amazing that she won her first grand slam at the French. That was my first grand slam and that same year I won Wimbledon in 1971. It's just magical when you achieve that dream and I'm sure it's magical for her, too."

Goolagong Cawley admitted she rode a rollercoaster of emotions watching the final as momentum ebbed and flowed.

"But all the way through I just sort of had this feeling that Ash's going to win. This is her time," she said. You know, somebody up there's looking down on us, I think, and during Naidoc week.

"We're both very proud. I'm a Wiradjuri woman from NSW and she's a very proud Aboriginal also, and so what a way to celebrate, not just my 50 years since I won there but it was Naidoc week and it was very important."