

## McCullough Twins



### How and when did you start playing tennis?

We started playing tennis in Singapore at the age of 7. Tennis was a sport that had run in our family, our mum played and still does, as did our older brother. We started playing tennis in Singapore by coincidence, our older brother Callum was sick one day and was meant to have a tennis lesson but couldn't go. So instead Caitlin and I went in his place, and the rest was history.

### What was your pathway to college tennis?

Our pathway to high performance college tennis all started in 2016 when we moved back to Northern Ireland. We spent the remainder of our junior years apart of the Windsor Performance Squads run by Przemek Stec, but also Ulster Tennis Performance and College Squads run by a number of coaches over the four years; Sam Armstrong, Carlos Miranda, Louise Bothwell, Lynsey McCullough and Michael Blease.

### What are your thoughts on the team dynamic of college tennis vs. the individual nature of tennis?

I think we can both say we have loved the college tennis dynamic! Tennis is very much an individual sport, so having the opportunities to play for a team can be so electric and exciting. Your teammates become your closest friends, your family and it is very special to compete for something bigger than yourself.

### Did you have any challenges as Juniors or how did each of you improve your game?

Our journey through junior tennis and even college tennis has been a journey of progression. When we moved to Northern Ireland in 2016, we did not immediately join the high performance Ulster Squads and spent a year improving our tennis before moving on up and being able to compete with the best girls in our age group. Similarly, in college tennis we have both continued to improve our games through hard work, on and off the tennis court and in the gym.

### **The Bryan brothers worked so well as a doubles partnership, same as yourselves, why do you think this is?**

**Annie:** Communication.....and a lot of patience and practice. When you play with a sibling or someone who you are as close to as Caitlin and I, your relationship as a partnership is very different and more personal. We spent a lot of years trying to figure out how to separate our personal relationship from our doubles partnership, and use it to our advantage not to our disadvantage. Also, from playing with each other for so many years, we know each other's games so well, I know when Caitlin is going to cross and what she is going to do with the ball.

**Caitlin:** I completely agree with Annie, I think communication and patience has been key to how successful we have been. Especially since Sophomore year when I transferred to Tusculum and started playing with Annie again our relationship on the doubles court has grown so much. We have realised that what we say to each other in-between points is just as important as the points being played. Also I think obviously through the experience of having played with each other for forever really we know each other's game styles and have been able to integrate our strengths and weaknesses. Lastly, we are truly a team on the doubles court, win or lose, I have so much trust in Annie as my partner and I think our teamwork and chemistry makes us a solid partnership.

### **How has your local club contributed to your tennis development?**

Family is the word that comes to mind when we think of our local tennis club; Windsor Tennis Club. Our local club has been a huge part of our tennis development, ever since we joined the club in 2016 the club, coaches and members have given us endless support, cheered us on from a far and we are so proud to be a part of Windsor.

### **What are your aspirations for when you finish college?**

**Caitlin:** My aspirations for when I finish college is to earn my Chartered Accounting Qualification in Dublin preferably, but definitely somewhere closer to home! But I also plan to continue playing tennis through the opportunities that I have at home, as Annie and I still have a couple more dreams we are looking to achieve together and it has been a huge part of my life I am not ready to give it up just yet.

**Annie:** My aspirations for when I finish college is continue my education by pursuing a Masters in Chemistry at a university in the UK. Like, Caitlin I will continue to play tennis as I am not ready to give up such a huge part of my life.

### **Who are your female role models and why?**

**Annie & Caitlin:** We don't necessarily have any specific female role models in sport, but we would say our true role model is our mum. She has been by both our sides through every stage of our lives, giving up so much of her time for us; driving us back and forth to tennis practices and tournaments, always there to cheer us on, listening to us, guiding in the right direction as players and as individuals. She is a very selfless person, always putting others before herself and we wouldn't be the people we are today without the small lessons she has taught us along the way as a result of the person she is.

### What is your favourite memory of playing?

**Annie & Caitlin:** This is so tough as tennis has given both Annie and I so many amazing memories, but I think we'd both agree that our most special memory was the DII National Championship back in October 2019. Reaching nationals had always been a dream that we'd talked about before and kind of joked about it saying "Imagine if we got there" and that semester of our senior year we did! Then going in with no expectations we lost in the National Championship final. It was a weekend of every emotion possible but it was probably both our proudest, most special and favourite memories of college tennis to date and also just being able to achieve what we did together it was better than what we dreamed about!

**Annie:** I think we would also agree that another favourite memory of playing tennis was in our 2018-2019 season when our team was crowned regular season champions by going undefeated in conference and beating our rivals Wingate and snapping their 72 regular season match winning streak.

### What advice do you have for young girls that play tennis or would like to play tennis?

**Annie:** Tennis is a sport for everyone. Play because you love it. I believe Caitlin and I's journey through junior and collegiate tennis has been unique, as it has been a journey of progression. When we first moved to Northern Ireland, we struggled to compete with the top girls in our age group but through hard work, patience and time we were able to progress and in due course we were competitive in our age group. 'Hard work pays off'. I can confidently say that we would not be where we are today without the amount of work we put in, not only in tennis, but in our studies, relationships and all aspects of life. It is also not all about winning, when we look back on our tennis careers we will remember the time spent with our teammates, coaches, friends, the bus journeys to games, the close matches fighting with our team; not the number of matches we won or didn't win. It's the people, places and moments that we will remember and cherish.

**Caitlin:** Like Annie said you don't have to be the best at tennis in order to play it, everyone's dreams are different but they still hold value, and if you have passion and love for the sport go out and pursue whatever those dreams are! And you know when it comes down to it tennis is such a great sport; playing tennis teaches you a lot about yourself, such as discipline, respect, strength and resilience. For us especially our journey through tennis has been one of hard work and resilience. Any sport is going to through you challenges, that's life but just like in any match it is important to remember to embrace those challenges head on, remain open and be willing to adapt and keeping working hard at it.

### What women in tennis developments do you hope to see in the years to come?

We both hope to see more Women in Tennis seminars as we were both very disappointed that we didn't sign up for the previous one and would love to participate in those developments. Also possibly more opportunities/events that would be cool would be for women across all 4 provinces to play together in mixed up teams, in an event set up like college tennis matches. It could provide opportunities for the upcoming females who might be interested in pursuing the college tennis

route to garner a little taste of what it is like, but it would also allow those who in college tennis or are finished to continue to play tennis competitively.

**Describe each other's best attributes in 3 or 4 words!**

**Caitlin:** Leader, Compassionate, Radiator (lights up a room), Loyal

**Annie:** Selfless, Priceless (Caitlin is so special, she is priceless) & Kind Hearted