



True confessions of a footy WAG

Zoe Foster is a journalist with Sydney's Sunday Telegraph, but for the best part of 10 years, she also carried the title of a WAG – the group collectively known as the Wives and Girlfriends of professional sportsmen. Tomorrow, she launches her book *Playing The Field*, which is an insider's view of being a high-profile "significant other". In this exclusive extract, Zoe reveals the reasons she will never be a WAG again.

SUNDAY morning, 9.45: Happily eat scrambled eggs with boyfriend at lovely Hunter Valley hotel.

9.48am: Open papers to see fourth article in as many weeks on his alleged affair with swimsuit model.

9.51am: Refrain from hurling pepper grinder at his face.

9.55am: Stomp to room to pack; wait (frothing) in car.

10.17am: Begin drive back to Sydney and three hours of deafening silence.

1.10pm: Exit car, slam door, spend a week asking myself whether I overreacted, or was within my rights to be angry, and did I have the energy for this stuff any more?

This "stuff" was being the girlfriend of a professional sportsman (a WAG, aka the Wives and Girlfriends of high-profile athletes), a role that over

almost a decade tested my confidence and relationship in ways I could not have fathomed when I fell in love.

I became a WAG at 18, when I started dating Craig Wing, also 18 (we broke up last year and remain friendly).

WAGs weren't focused on much back then but nowadays the WAGs of every sport, from football, tennis, golf, cricket and Formula 1 to lawn bowls, are demi-celebrities, some in their own right; some simply by virtue of the fact they date a sportsman.

I met some of my best friends through football. But the groupies are incorrigible and predatory.

Women always asked me how, with a handsome Bachelor of the Year footballer boyfriend, I did it.

As the years went on, I stopped responding with my usual effervescent deflections.

I wasn't doing it. I sucked at being a WAG. I failed all the tests.

These tests vary.

There are the familiar ones – the boys travel a lot, you spend weekends without your boyfriend, you attend weddings and other functions alone. Then there are those that are less documented. These tests required a solid core of self-confidence, several tonnes of trust and an atypical amount of emotional elegance.

One test involved a gorgeous thing shimmying in between Craig and me at a nightclub, so she could query if he was with the correct woman.

"Why are you with her?" she said. "My girlfriend," she pointed to her friend sipping her drink a few metres away "is heaps prettier and I come as part of the deal, too."



After hours of women aggressively approaching my boyfriend, ignoring me completely, and spitting in the face of sisterhood, this was the proverbial straw and it was about to cause serious vertebrae damage to any nearby camels.

I wondered: if that's what happens while I'm there, what goes on when I'm not?

I know of one WAG who, upon busting her footballer partner with another woman in a nightclub and watching in shock as he moved to protect his mistress instead of consoling his extremely angry and upset girlfriend, punched him *and* her.

Then there was the test where a revolting, sleazy friend of the boys brought a couple of strippers to a club function and openly encouraged them to meet and have a drink with Craig and a few other lucky players.

Or the one where a couple of young girls stood a few metres away from us at a fast-food joint, and one spoke loudly of how much she would love to perform sexual favours on Craig Wing and how well she'd do it.

Craig laughed; I snapped.

In my mind that was spectacularly offensive, and I thought he was enjoying the attention too much.

Definitely failed that one.

Other fails included going off my nut after seeing a full-page article on him and a *Ralph* magazine model from the Gold Coast photographed together, and the details of their awesome night on the town after he judged a bikini competition up there (seriously).

Or a (very hot) non-WAG friend

texting me to ask what time the barbecue began ... the barbecue the WAGs had all been told was going to be strictly for the boys.

Even if you learn to gracefully ignore the stuff in the media, it's another matter when your friends spend anguished weeks or months withholding intelligence on the purported wrongdoings of your partner because they don't know whether to tell you.

It's lose-lose. You second-guess, overthink and find yourself constantly re-evaluating what your deal-breakers are.

Craig grew tired of constantly defending himself – and I got tired of being a jail warden. But, inconveniently, the footy rumour tap never tires of running

It's not all bad, obviously. I'm focusing on the worst of it.

There are perks to being the partner of a professional athlete – I'm not so ungracious as to reflect on my time as a WAG without being grateful for the spoils.

Combine the luxuries with all the other lunacy and you get one remarkable little ride.

Not to mention the perfect fodder for a novel which, despite me being rubbish at playing a WAG, is precisely why I wrote about being one.

***Playing The Field*, by Zoe Foster (Penguin, \$32.95) on sale tomorrow.**



GAME FOR IT: (Top) Zoe Foster and Craig Wing at the GQ magazine Men of the Year Awards and (above) Zoe with her previous book *Textbook Romance*.

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