

# COURTURE

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FEBRUARY / 26

## ABIGALE SUTHERLAND

RISING THROUGH  
IT ALL

SPOTTED IN  
SEVENTH  
GRADE

TRAVEL  
MUST-HAVES

WITH THE  
BEAT



A PLANET NETBALL PUBLICATION

Welcome to this edition of Courture.

Courture's purpose is to help netballers raise their profiles and tell their stories.

I extend a heartfelt thank you to Abigale Sutherland for sharing her very personal story for our February issue.

Thanks also goes to Marvette Anderson for her time, Michelle Welch at Step Out 7, Karen Baugh, and Netball Jamaica for all their support in making this edition possible.

To our advertisers - thank you for believing in a fledgling publication, and helping us keep Courture free for our readers.

Most importantly, thank you to you, the reader. I hope you are enjoying getting to know netballers in this way, and please do send in your feedback on Courture.

**Harriet Millard** - Editor



*With Thanks*

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# ABIGALE SUTHERLAND PROFILE

**Name:** Abigale Sutherland

**Date of birth:** 16th April 2001

**Age:** 24

**Home town:** Kingston, Jamaica

**Height:** 170 cm

**Playing positions:** C, WA

**Current club:** Tivoli Netball Club

**Debut for Jamaica:** 2022 vs Silver Ferns, New Zealand

**Senior caps:** 27

**Achievements:** Reserve on the Jamaican 2023 World Cup team that won bronze  
BSc. Psychology, University of the West Indies (scholarship)



*Commentators' cheat sheet*

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# 01

## WATER HOUSE

Outwardly, many people assume that Jamaica's midcourter, Abigale Sutherland came from a stable background. In reality, her story was far more complex.

Looking back at her turbulent childhood, Abigale speaks with a composure that feels at odds with the experiences she describes. Her voice is calm and measured as she revisits her early years, beginning simply:

**“My childhood was all  
over the place.”**

Abigale grew up in Waterhouse, a community in St Andrew, Kingston, the place where Jamaican track and field sprinter Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce also called home.

Born to a sixteen-year-old mother, she faced difficult circumstances from the very beginning, as her mother was unable to complete her own education, but it was here that Abigale attended primary school and first discovered her love for netball.

*“I walked to school. That’s where I started playing netball but with very few resources - we played barefooted until you could get shoes from wherever a coach could get a sponsor.”*

Life in Waterhouse was challenging. The area was marked by instability and gang violence, and tragedy struck her family at a young age.

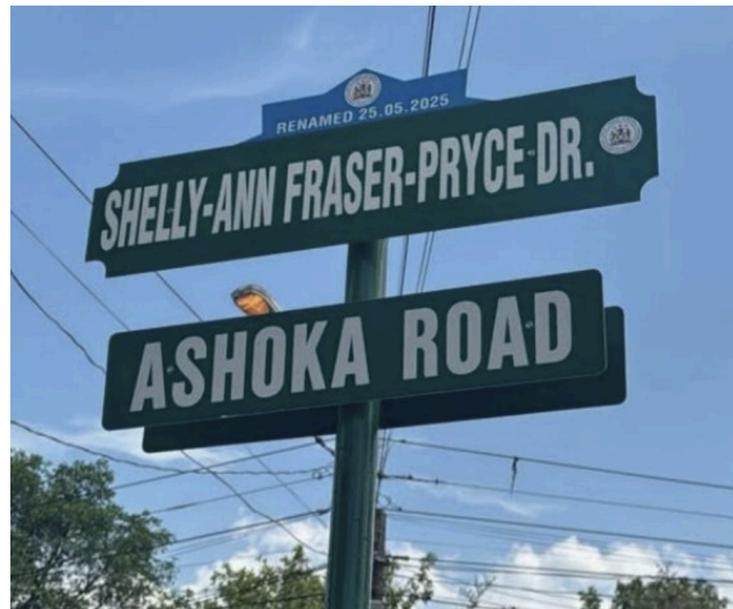


*“I lost both my uncles to violence because I grew up in a volatile area. I had to move from where I lived, and started living with my grandmother, and that’s the period where I went to high school - The Queen’s School for Girls.”*

Living with her grandmother meant adjusting to financial hardship and limited support.

*“There it was a bit rough because my grandmother didn’t have the support financially.”*

Despite these traumatic challenges, Abigale excelled at school and on the netball court. She describes herself as driven and capable.



***“I went to live with this big family with about eight different strangers”***

*“I was pretty smart, and I also played netball really well, so I met this lady who taught PE at my high school, and she liked me, she found out that I was in a hard situation living with my grandma.”*

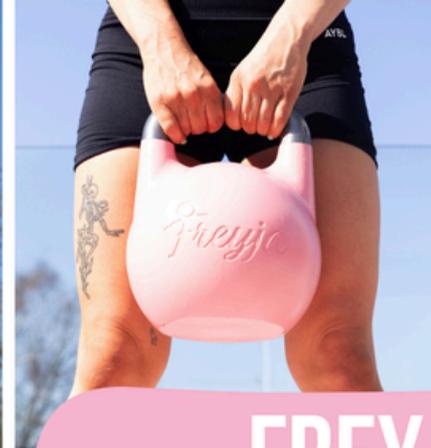
That teacher, Jannette Stephens, would become a turning point in her life. Seeing Abigale’s potential and vulnerability, she made an extraordinary intervention.

*“She offered to have me live with her and her family, I was aged about 13, Jannette was a complete stranger.”*

Moving in with Jannette meant entering a completely different world.

*“I went to live with this big family with about eight different strangers but they were all so welcoming and nice, and the environment was completely different from what I was used to before - they had more resources and they were better off to say the least.”*

For the first time in her life, Abigale experienced stability and security. *“It was a complete shift because I then was left wanting nothing.”*



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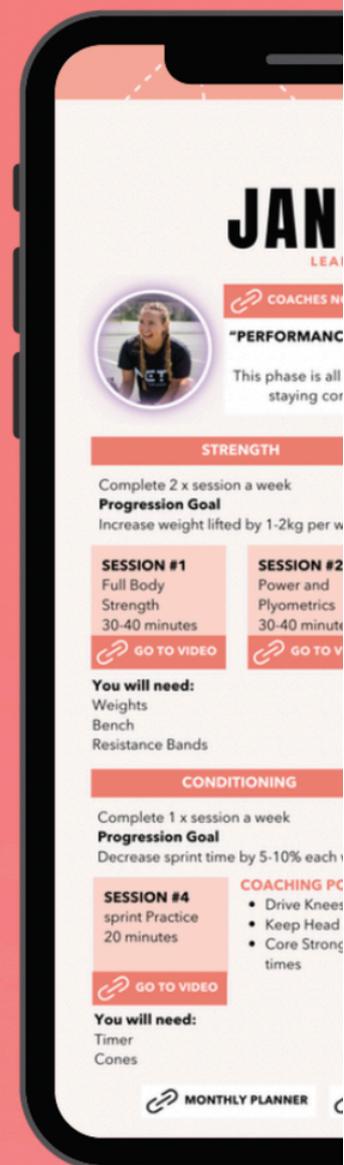


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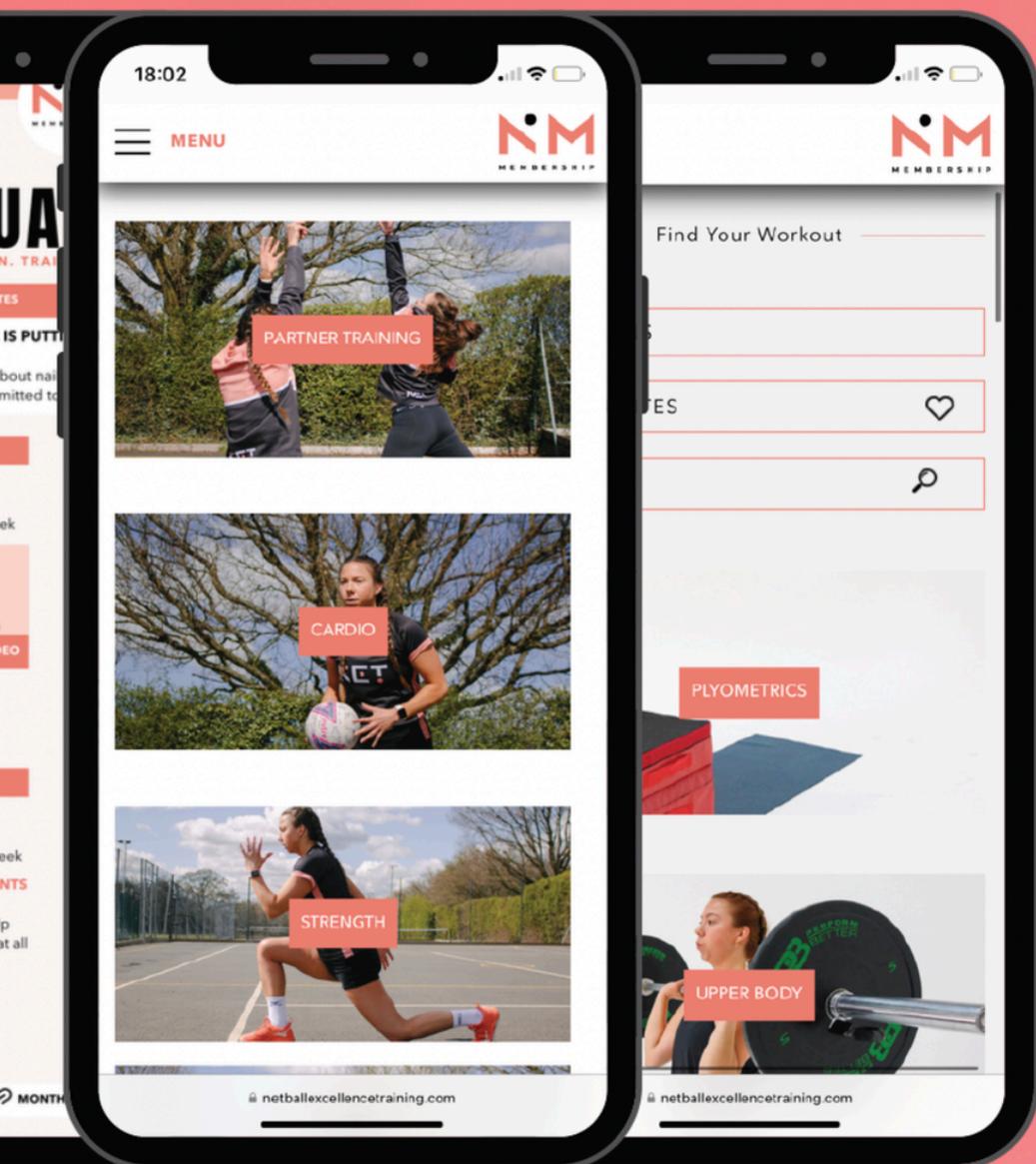
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## SPOTTED IN SEVENTH GRADE

# 02

**To trace the beginnings of Abigale Sutherland’s netball journey is to return to a school court in Kingston, where her promise first revealed itself to her coach: Marvette Anderson.**

Anderson still remembers the moment when Abigale arrived at The Queen’s School as a 12 year old - an age when most netballers are still finding their feet.

Though Abby had played through primary school, she was selected into higher age groups at The Queen’s.

*“She qualified for the U16s team and normally a student coming in at seventh grade would have to be exceptional to make that team, Abigale was one of those students.*

*“She was that player that you could put in any position that you may have a deficiency in, so at some point she was playing centre, at some*

*point she was shooting, at some point she was in defence. She was that player that you could put anywhere.”*

With that versatility came immediate influence. Abigale did not take long to make an impact, helping to drive her team towards sustained success.

*“We were able to win a number of championships with her as a part of the team, so her impact was immediate and beneficial to us up until the time that she left high school. In her third year of high school she made the national U16 team and was also the captain of that team.”*

Leadership also emerged, shaped by work ethic, trust, and consistency, culminating in national recognition while she was still in school.

**“She was that player that you could put in any position.”**

For Anderson, what stood out was not only what Abigale could do physically, but how she thought about the game.

*“Abigale’s fitness was one thing that caught my eye, she was able to transition from one end of the court to the other in a short space of time and her knowledge and understanding of the game was another thing that caught my eye.*

*She is what I would call a student of the game and so because of that she was able to adjust to any situation.”*

Alongside her sporting growth, Anderson watched Abigale develop a strong sense of self:

*“She is respectful, she is determined,*

*she takes pride in her game, she takes pride in her work, she takes pride in herself, she’s what I would call a little diva, when you see her she’s always well put together.”*

Yet Abigale’s path, like all meaningful journeys, was not without detours.

There were seasons of disappointment and uncertainty, moments when progress stalled and dreams seemed distant, but when asked about Abigale’s strengths, Anderson cited resilience to continue when things didn’t go as planned.

*“She didn’t make the U21s in 2017, but she continued, and then Covid came and she kept going and going until she caught the eye of the selectors and was introduced to the senior program.”*

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**“She kept going and going until she caught the eye of the selectors.”**

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Anderson on Sutherland

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“She is what I would call  
a student of the game.”

Marvette Anderson on Abigale Sutherland

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# HOLDING ON, MOVING UP

# 03

**Abigale Sutherland's rise through Jamaica's netball system is testament to determination.**

After being selected to be captain of the U16 national team for a Barbados tour, she returned to a call from the U21 selectors, however that was also a disappointment as she was selected as a reserve.

*"I was devastated because like any athlete I thought I should have been selected so I kind of bucked away from the sport a little bit but I still played club netball. While playing club netball again I was focused on getting back in the national program."*

Rather than letting the setback define her, Abigale refocused and graduated high school with a full scholarship to the University of the West Indies to study Psychology.



Whilst there she continued to develop her game while building her future beyond sport, and during InterCol (the Inter-Collegiate League) Abigale received a call up to trial for the senior Jamaican team - the Sunshine Girls.

Life as an international athlete brought new structures and support, including time spent at the 'Sunshine Chalet' - Netball Jamaica's house for athletes to stay at during camps.

*"We can overnight there so that we are closer to training, we love it. It has made a difference to Netball Jamaica. It not only saves us money but it gives us time to bond because when we are there its like a whole different kind of family - everybody shares everything we cook together, we wash up together, we have karaoke."*

For Abigale, her personal journey is central to how she performs on court.

*“I think it makes me very confident. One would think it would be the opposite but it makes me very confident knowing where I have started to where I am now. I am very proud of who I am so I play with that sense of confidence, I’m very determined.”*

She continues to refine her style and responsibilities.

*“I think I’m more of an attacking centre so I’m trying to get a great balance with being an attacker AND a defender so I think [I’ll be] working on going back to defend.”*

Wearing the national dress is a source of deep pride.

*“To see where I’ve started to where I’ve come, and the support I get to see how everybody in the country loves the Sunshine Girls and to see how proud they are.”*

*“And I love how excited it makes my family to have something to cheer for. Playing for the Sunshine Girls is literally my dream, I love it.”*

That pride extends across both her biological and adopted families.

*“My Grandfather means the world to me. Because when I was living in Waterhouse I was living with him and my uncles before they passed.”*

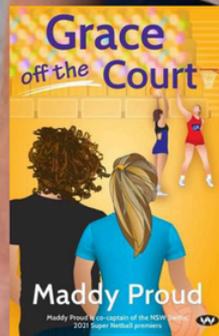
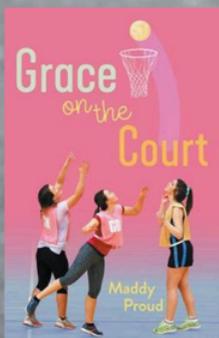
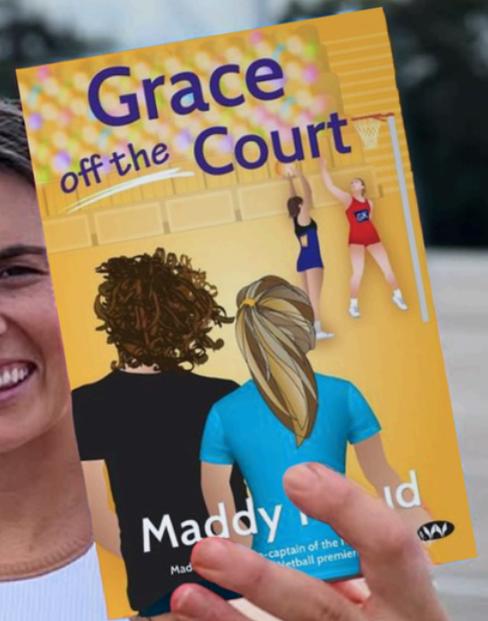
Even when circumstances prevent him from watching live, his support remains constant. Sadly he was unable to watch the Horizon Series because power had not been restored to his area after Hurricane Melissa.

**“He walks around as proud as a peacock, uses every opportunity to tell everyone that his granddaughter is a Sunshine Girl.”**

Abigale’s journey to this point reflects the strength of a person who carries her past with her, along with the pride she has brought to her family, and her community every time she steps onto the court.

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# ABBY'S TRAVEL MUST-HAVES...



# O 4

# WITH THE BEAT

**In Jamaica, sport and sound are never far apart. Any international netballer who's travelled to the island to play the Sunshine Girls knows.**

Players often remark on the vibes and the noise and the music at the national arena.

While track and field, and football dominate the nation's media headlines, netball is also a source of pride, and passion from fans is heard through the clanging of pots and pans, and seen through the joyous singing and dancing in support of their beloved national team.

For Abigale Sutherland, music and rhythm has followed her from her childhood in Waterhouse to her weekend house cleaning routine to the elite netball stage.

*"When I was younger living with my grandfather in Waterhouse, kids parties in the community were a thing, they would form circles and you would dance, you were dancing from three years old with everyone around you cheering."*

Now that same energy flows into the Sunshine Girls' environment. Abigale is often the team's DJ, with R&B and dance music filling the changing room before the whistle, and matchday rituals are as much about feeling as they are about tactics.

*"Before a game we have the boom box, we dance and sing, we might play a little game - a game like in a circle, when we say look up everyone has to look up but you can't make eye contact with any one, but if you do you are out."*

Style is another extension of her personality. In fashion, as in music and in life, she follows feeling rather than formula using Pinterest as inspiration.

She thinks her teammates would see this side of her if asked: *"Fashionable, loving, very silly, always dancing, very confident, and caring."*

In a sporting culture often measured by medals and rankings, Abigale's story is also about atmosphere, about music, movement, energy and community.

From dancing in neighbourhood circles as a toddler, to leading playlists for the national team, she carries her identity with her and it has always had a beat.

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# THROUGH THE NEXT

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## 05

As she looks to the future, Abigale Sutherland has her sights set on a move to an overseas league, reflecting both her development and her willingness to challenge herself in new environments.

From a young age, she was used to being tested. Playing above her age group became normal, not exceptional, but it meant adapting quickly and meeting higher standards early on.

The Suncorp Super Netball or the Netball Super League would be a natural progression and her career so far suggests she is well prepared for that.

Off the court, her choice of degree was based on personal experience and will be a useful qualification.

*“Because I had been through so much I wanted to see the world through a different lens, I think that’s why I was drawn to psychology.”*

*“Outside of netball, or even not outside netball I think I would like to go in to sports psychology because I think in Jamaica they don’t really believe in that type of thing - how mental health can really affect game play. So I think I would like to not introduce it but show the importance of it.”*

Family and community continue to underpin everything she does, and making her grandfather proud makes her proud. When she reflects on everything that has happened in her life though, unusually acknowledgment comes through.



**“I am just grateful to be honest, because before, I couldn’t imagine being here. I didn’t have a plan but then everything kind of worked out.”**



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