

MAYA

GAME, SET,



Young, talented and with fire in her belly – for Maya Joint, Australia’s No. 1 women’s tennis player, the world is hers to conquer

words TESS DEVIVE DE RÉGIE

It’s been a whirlwind few years for Maya Joint. In January 2024, she was barely on the tennis map, ranked 684 in the world. By October 2025, she had reached 32 and, for the first time, became Australia’s highest-ranked female player. All this since embarking on the Women’s Tennis Association (WTA) circuit two years ago – and all before the age of 20.

“At the beginning [of 2025], I definitely didn’t think I was going to end up as the number-one

Aussie, but it was definitely a goal,” reflects Joint over the phone from Melbourne Park. “I didn’t know if I could get there by the end of this year, which I did somehow.”

It has been, indeed, a stellar 12 months for the self-styled “Ginger Ninja.” When she beat Carlota Martínez Cirez in the first round of the Madrid Open in April, Joint became the youngest Australian ever to score a WTA 1000 match victory, just five days after her 19th birthday, surpassing the record set by Ash Barty in 2017.

In 2025, Joint also took out three WTA championships, earning her maiden singles title at the Moroccan Open in May, where she and Georgia’s Oksana Kalashnikova won the doubles event.

“[This year] I had a goal of [winning] a title,” she reflects. “I didn’t know if that would happen, but it happened.” The following month, she won the Eastbourne Open, defeating 2021 US Open champion and local darling Emma Raducanu and three-time grand slam finalist Ons Jabeur along the way.

Joint was born in Michigan in April 2006 to a German mother, Katja, and an Australian father, Michael, whose work as head squash professional at the Detroit Athletic Club had brought the family to the US. “As long as I can remember, I wanted to be a professional tennis player,” she says. “But it was also just a thing that everyone kind of said at that age.”

Growing up, Joint admired the now-retired Barty, who between 2019-22 claimed three Grand Slam titles – at Roland-Garros, Wimbledon and the Australian Open – during the glorious second phase of her pro-tennis career. “I was able to meet and hit with her last year, which was really cool,” shares Joint. “That was super special.” (In a November 2025 interview with AAP, Barty said: “Maya is a really lovely girl who works exceptionally hard and it’s nice to see some of those girls that put in the work behind the scenes . . . get the rewards, because they deserve it.”)

When she was 13, it became apparent to Joint and her family that a future career in the sport was no mere pipedream. “I was doing pretty well in juniors,” she recalls. “I wasn’t really training at that time either. My parents always said, ‘Imagine what you could do if you had actual training.’”

In 2023, when she was 17 and feeling somewhat underappreciated by the United States Tennis Association, Joint switched her allegiance from the US to Australia, prompting Tennis Australia to provide her with crucial support and training opportunities, including access to the National Tennis Academy in Brisbane. “I got a lot of help to build my ranking up,” she shares. “I had a fitness program, a mental coach, a nutritionist – I had [it all]. Everything started clicking into place.”

Later that year, she earned her first International Tennis Federation title – the level immediately below the top-tier WTA circuit – in doubles at the Gold Coast International alongside compatriot Roisin Gilheany. By May of the following year, Joint had cracked the top 200.

At the beginning of the 2024 academic year, she headed to the University of Texas. “I chose psychology as a major and then criminology as a minor,” she says. “I always wanted to go to college, just to have that experience, because I was homeschooled since fourth grade. I never really got to be in a classroom that much.”

Joint secured a scholarship and a spot on the university’s Texas Longhorns women’s tennis team, but her college experience was short-lived. “I was there for a couple of weeks in person and then I left after a semester. I was trying to go on the pro tour [and] it was too much with all the classes and the tennis-team commitment that you have to do.”

Straddling studies and a tennis career also created something of a financial headache. Joint made her grand slam debut at the 2024 US Open, where she defeated German Laura Siegemund in the first round, a victory that in normal circumstances would have entitled Joint to US\$140,000 (\$216,000) worth of prize money. But under rules imposed by the National Collegiate Athletic Association, she could accept only up to US\$10,000

(\$15,400) per calendar year. It was perhaps an easy decision, then, to put her studies on ice – a decision she announced in December 2024. The ensuing months delivered a series of firsts: Joint’s maiden WTA main-draw singles win (at the Brisbane International); her debut in the main draws of three of the majors; cracking the top 100 and a sponsorship deal with Red Bull.

“Walking onto the Wimbledon grounds for the first time [was a highlight], because I didn’t get to play there when I was a junior,” she says. “[It] was very different to all the other slams. Everything was so quiet and everyone was dressed very proper. The grass is just perfect; the ball bounces almost like a hard court.”

Fast-forward to the present and, thanks to her ranking, she’s on track to be seeded at January’s Australian Open – another milestone. She relishes the prospect of competing on home turf. “It makes it a lot better to be surrounded by [family and friends] during a tournament. You don’t feel like you’re playing this super-big event.”

Joint may well be the heir apparent to the likes of Barty, and, especially ahead of the Australian Open, will likely attract the hopes of a nation hungry for a new local champion. But Barty cautioned against expecting too much too soon of the teen. “She’s very much in the infancy of her career,” she told AAP. “[At the Open,] I would love to see her enjoy the occasion, enjoy the moment.”

For her part, however, Joint seems inclined to keep aiming high. “I think getting into the top 20 would be a good goal [for 2026],” she shares. “And then winning a [WTA] 500 event would be something I think I could do. I’ve gotten close a couple times, so I think I can do it.” HB

OPPOSITE PAGE Joint is all smiles after a year of breakthroughs and milestones on the WTA Tour. THIS PAGE The Joint serve, while, well, serviceable, is not her forte. That would be her aggressive return game, through which she routinely piles pressure onto her opponent.

Photography: Jackson Loria, courtesy of Red Bull.