

## ‘Heartbeat of our nation’: Ash Barty ticks off lifelong goal with visit to Uluru

- *World No 1 has a hit with local children, calling them ‘incredible athletes’*
- *Run of 110 consecutive weeks in top spot is fifth longest streak in history*



*Ash Barty plays tennis with students from Mutitjulu school during a visit to Uluru.*

### **Guardian sport**

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Ash Barty has celebrated her 110th consecutive week as the tennis world’s No 1 by ticking a special place in her homeland off her bucket list. The Australian may have travelled the world but only this week did she have the opportunity to visit Uluru for the first time.

Barty, who on Monday retained her place at the top of the WTA rankings, has spent the past few days learning more about her Indigenous roots in the red centre of Australia before a return to the tour at Indian Wells next week for the first time since claiming her maiden Australian Open title.

“It’s really hard to put into words, just because it’s a feeling,” Barty told Tennis Australia. “When you actually go to Uluru for the first time like I did, it was just an incredible experience for me to understand how much of a spiritual connection Uluru has for so many communities.

“But also as a child, as an Aboriginal girl growing up, it’s the heartbeat of our nation ... being able to experience that first-hand is something I always wanted to do. To be able to allow myself, through my profession and through my career, to have this opportunity was really special.”



*Barty poses with the Daphne Akhurst Memorial Cup, which she won at the Australian Open.*

The proud Ngarigo woman visited Uluru and Alice Springs in her capacity as Tennis Australia’s First Nations ambassador and she had a hit with local school students as part of the Racquets and Red Dust program, with the iconic scenery serving as a backdrop.

“They are incredible athletes,” Barty said of the students. “They started playing tennis a couple of days ago and we were already having some rallies, which is just mind-blowing. I think it brings people together, first and foremost. It allows people to feel safe in an environment.

“Of course, there’s the health and wellbeing attributes that come with being fit, being outdoors and I think the education also comes with the opportunity. It’s learning a new skill, it’s talking to people, it’s learning different ways of life, connecting with people that come from all walks of life.”

Barty’s imminent return to the tour coincides with her 117th week at the top of the world rankings – a feat she now shares with Justine Henin as the seventh highest number of weeks spent as No 1 in women’s tennis history.

Her run of 110 consecutive weeks spent as No 1 is the fifth longest streak in history and, given her substantial lead in the rankings over the world No 2, Aryna Sabalenka (Barty has 8,330 points to the Belarusian’s 5,563), she is likely to overtake the American Chris Evert’s fourth-best mark of 113 next month.

