

# The Advertiser

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## **In celebrating the Indigenous Round, we need to shine a light on struggles still being faced**

By Tony Armstrong  
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THIS week we are celebrating the Indigenous Round, and for the first time in the AFL's history a round has been named after someone: Sir Doug Nicholls.

Most people know something of Sir Doug: a brilliant athlete, he was a star for Fitzroy, the first indigenous player to be picked for Victoria, third in the 1934 Brownlow Medal as well as being an outstanding sprinter. An inspiring and principled man, he also served as Governor of South Australia in the 1970s.

But particularly in the early stages of his career, Sir Doug suffered racism and was ostracised by some teammates.

The Sir Doug Nicholls Round carries a great deal of importance because it celebrates the enormous contribution our indigenous players have made, not only to Australian football, but also to the community. But it should also remind us of the challenges some of those players faced and continue to face - challenges that are vast, varied and must not be undersold.

When you consider where some of these men have come from, it's clear that simply making it to the AFL is an achievement to be applauded.

So many indigenous players come from so far behind their white counterparts, not just from a perception point of view but also from a cultural point of view. Just to be drafted they, unfairly, are forced to buck the stereotypes: that they will be lazy, inconsistent, irresponsible or erratic. Even in these apparently enlightened times, they have to work so much harder and for longer to be considered reliable, hardworking and trustworthy.

Some of them come into the game with English as a second language, some are living under traditional and federal law. On top of that, there is the perceived "go home" factor, which has been an issue for recruiters in the past, purely because it is believed that as an indigenous man from community, you will want to leave and head home.

Despite those issues, some of our game's biggest stars, and those who bring in the biggest crowds, are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders. Lance Franklin and Cyril Rioli are two of the nation's most idolised sportsmen, but they are only two in a vast group of brilliant players.

But my question is this: does the success of our Indigenous AFL stars mask the range of issues that the rest of the Aboriginal population face? In a week when the struggle against adversity is celebrated from a football viewpoint, it would be remiss of us not to shine a light on the struggles still being faced by our First Peoples on a daily basis.

As an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, you are more likely to be arrested, put in jail and die there than you were 25 years ago. Gerry Georgatos of the Human Rights

Alliance in Perth has said that "Western Australia incarcerates the Aboriginal people of its state at a rate nine times higher than apartheid South Africa".

We are currently on track to have Aboriginal people comprise 50 per cent of our prison population by 2020; in 1992, the ratio was one in seven.

But still we speak about these issues like they are a thing of the past. To understand why we have these over-representations, our society needs to understand Aboriginal history. We need to have an understanding of the broad pain that was caused by the Stolen Generation and not just the impact it had on the people directly involved.

It is so important to understand that indigenous parents and other family members are continuing to suffer the cumulative effects of ongoing traumas and then passing those on to the next generations.

Many courts don't consider the trauma that has been suffered and that results in sentencing disproportionate to the crimes. We treat our Indigenous people as second-class citizens; only last year the Western Australian Government proposed the forced closure of 150 remote indigenous communities.

I applaud the AFL for deciding to name a round after Sir Doug Nicholls. It fills me with pride. Perhaps soon we'll start to see indigenous people at the very highest levels of our football clubs. But we cannot continue to ignore the struggles faced by our First People, a race with the oldest surviving culture in the world.

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