

## Rioli will need more time: Mitchell to Hawthorn staff



*Hawthorn coach, and Cyril Rioli's former teammate in four Hawks premierships sides, Sam Mitchell.*

By Jake Niall  
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Hawthorn coach Sam Mitchell has told club staff that estranged former star Cyril Rioli will need to be given time to reconcile with the Hawks.

Mitchell and Hawthorn chief executive Justin Reeves addressed staff on the Rioli issue at a meeting on Monday morning, with Reeves saying the matter demonstrated how society, as a whole, had to improve in the area of Indigenous relations, and that the club was working with their Indigenous liaison manager Brady Grey to improve.

Mitchell's comments to staff marked the third time in a matter of three days that the new senior coach had taken the lead and spoken to club personnel about Rioli's estrangement from the club where the brilliant forward played in four premierships and mesmerised fans for 11 seasons.

Mitchell had previously spoken to Hawthorn's Indigenous players on Friday night, in the knowledge that *The Age* was about to publish a story quoting Rioli and his wife Shannyn Ah-Sam Rioli about their separation from the Hawks and the reasons behind it, which included a comment from president Jeff Kennett that caused the couple offence in 2018 - the year Rioli walked away from the game.

Mitchell also addressed the whole playing group on the Rioli matter on Saturday, the day before the Hawks were pipped by Carlton, overcoming a 41-point deficit to hit the front in the final quarter before losing by a point, in what was a spirited display.

But the episode that has caused the most consternation among current and former Hawthorn insiders has been the 2013 episode at an end-of-season trip in which, according to the Riolis, a senior player asked whether an Indigenous teammate's wife was "also a boong". Key Hawks people from that time say they were unaware of the offensive comment, which upset Rioli and his then teammate who heard it.

Hawthorn, as yet, has not planned action over the Rioli situation, besides reflecting upon it and listening to relevant people including their Indigenous players.

Mitchell has been the public face of Hawthorn's response to the Rioli story, the senior coach having reached out to his former teammate in recent months in an attempt to reconnect with the much-adored and electrifying former star. Rioli told *The Age* that the Hawks were "the only club I wouldn't put my hand up right now".