

‘I was drowning inside’: Betts feared same fate as Goodes if he called out racial abuse earlier



Carlton star Eddie Betts says he was subjected to racial abuse throughout his entire AFL career.

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Former Carlton and Adelaide player Eddie Betts says he was racially abused his entire career but feared speaking up for years because he was worried he would suffer the same fate as Sydney great Adam Goodes.

Goodes, a dual Brownlow medallist, called out a young Collingwood fan in the stands who racially vilified him during a game in the Indigenous Round of 2013. Crowned Australian of the Year in 2014 for his advocacy against racism, he was subsequently subjected to a booing campaign by rival fans, which became relentless in 2015 and hastened his retirement.

Betts told *AFL 360* he had been racially abused his entire career but only found the confidence to call it out at age 28. He played at Carlton from 2005-13, joined Adelaide from 2014-19 and returned to the Blues for two final seasons before retiring at the end of last year.

“I found my voice at 28,” he said on Wednesday night.

“I’ve been racially abused my whole playing career, but I was too scared to call it out. I was too scared to speak up because I thought what would happen to ‘Goodesy’ is going to happen to me.”

He said he had struggled during his time at the Crows because he did not have anyone to talk to about his experiences who could understand what he was going through.

“There was no Indigenous liaison there and I needed someone to talk to. I was trying to be strong for these young Indigenous players and my family and my people around Australia,” he said.

“I had a big smile on my face but I was drowning inside.”

He said he needed someone to “feel the pain I was going through”.

“They couldn’t really understand how I was feeling. I was talking to them, but they didn’t feel it.”

The AFL has this year mandated an Indigenous liaison officer be employed at each of the 18 clubs.

Betts also spoke about Cyril Rioli, who retired at 28 in 2018 and along with his wife Shannyn Ah Sam-Rioli recently told *The Age* about their experiences at Hawthorn and why they led to his retirement.

“At 28, 29 that’s when I found my voice. And Cyril retired at 28,” he said.

“It’s great that [Rioli and Shannyn] called it out but I wish he stayed on longer and called it out.

“It’s sad to see Cyril retire because of this, because of racism. One of the best talents to probably play this game.

“I believe now I have a voice and a platform to use and that’s to continue to help educate Australia.”