

# FOOTBALL'S INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT: STATE OF PLAY

A report by  
Professional Footballers Australia  
on behalf of John Moriarty Football

JOHN MORIARTY  
**FOOTBALL**  
*A Game Changer*



# INTRODUCTION

Engagement between the major sports and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians provides a significant opportunity for mutual benefit. For sports, there is a pool of talent to be tapped, and a community of potential supporters to be embraced. For Indigenous communities, sport has the power to enhance social, education and health outcomes, and provide a pathway to rewarding professional careers, in turn developing inspirational role models.

In addition, most national sport organisations have embraced their responsibility as significant Australian cultural institutions to promote inclusivity of Indigenous communities and cultures and contribute towards reconciliation.

Football has pursued this opportunity and duty in the past. In 2009, Football Federation Australia (FFA) announced a 10-year Indigenous Football Development Program including targets to have 5% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in the national teams. John Moriarty was announced as Patron. In 2012, FFA launched its first Indigenous Football Devel-

opment Strategy: a five-year plan with ambitious objectives across the three priority areas of participation, elite talent and social development outcomes.

Momentum has been lost. The initiatives were barely pursued and outcomes of these plans were never assessed, at least publicly. In FFA's Whole of Football Plan, its 109-page 2015-2035 vision document, the word "Indigenous" appears just twice, both times under sections outlining challenges the game faces. In three years, the FFA went from striving to make football the "sport of first choice" for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to releasing a 20-year strategy for football in Australia which practically ignores Indigenous Australians.

This shift in focus coincides with a reduction in government funding for FFA's Indigenous football development activities. The failure to secure this funding represents a failure to effectively tell the story of football's power to unite and uplift those from disadvantaged backgrounds in particular, and a failure by the custodians of our sport to fulfil its duty to activate that power.

In the absence of a coordinated strategy, and in response to the inertia within football towards Indigenous participation, the void has been partly filled by independent organisations such as John Moriarty Football and passionate individuals doing great work in isolation. But that is not enough. Meanwhile, other sports have been making significant collective progress.

The governing bodies of Rugby League, Rugby Union and Cricket all have a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) in place. The AFL has completed a RAP and now every AFL club has its own RAP.

The purpose of this document is to benchmark the progress being made by other sports to highlight football's missed opportunity, and to call for a reignition of football's Indigenous engagement.



# RESEARCH APPROACH

To compare engagement and investment in Indigenous Australia by different sports is not a straightforward task. Each sport is operating at a different scale, with unique historic 'starting points' and structural differences to consider. Different sports make different information available regarding Indigenous participation and representation, staffing and financial commitments. Each sport has differently structured elite teams and professional leagues. For these reasons, the scope for a direct side-by-side comparison of quantitative metrics is limited.

It is also not in the scope of this document to provide an exhaustive account of every last program and initiative undertaken across each sport. It should be noted that there is commendable work being done at a state and regional level in the various sports, but from a cursory analysis, this is not at a scale to act in place of a structured national approach.

A sport's engagement includes many subjective qualities that cannot be captured in a graph or chart, like the breadth and authenticity of its approach, its attitudes and respect. So the intention of this document is to provide a fair and accurate high-level summary of each national sporting organisation's strategies to engage with, include and celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The interpretation of the data will be left to the reader.

In this spirit, the stories of Indigenous athletes have been included throughout these pages to further illustrate the benefits of engagement at a human level and highlight the missed opportunities on both sides.





# WHAT IS A RECONCILIATION ACTION PLAN?

According to the Reconciliation Australia website, a RAP “provides a framework for organisations to support the national reconciliation movement”. For workplaces, a RAP is “a strategic document that supports an organisation’s business plan” which “includes practical actions that will drive an organisation’s contribution to reconciliation both internally and in the communities in which it operates”.

There are four types of RAP – Reflect, Innovate, Stretch, Elevate – to cater to organisations at different stages of their reconciliation journey. More than 500 organisations across Australia have a RAP.

RAPs are both visionary and practical. They articulate an organisation’s desire to engage with and contribute to Indigenous Australia in an authentic and meaningful way. They illustrate the collaborative process by which

the vision is crafted and lay out a detailed roadmap of desired outcomes and specific actions, timeframes and responsibilities.

RAPs focus on building relationships, respect and opportunities. In a sports context, that means looking beyond representation targets and considering structures that include an Indigenous voice in decision-making, for example, or cultural education for non-Indigenous staff and the broader fanbase.

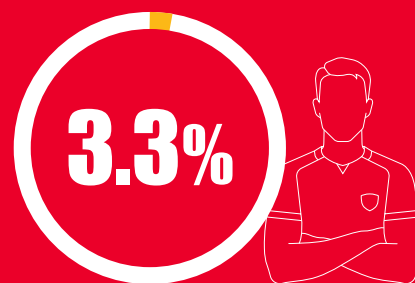
A RAP is not a prerequisite for an organisation to take a proactive and effective approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement. But since the other major national sporting bodies have used RAPs to underpin their strategies, it makes to cover them in detail for the purpose of this cross-code comparison.



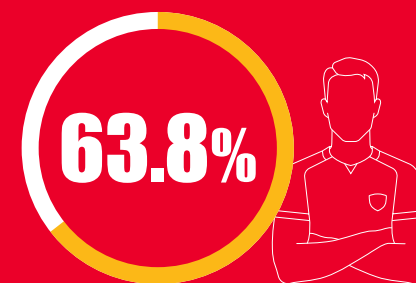
# FOOTBALL

## SNAPSHOT:

**40,493** **INDIGENOUS PARTICIPANTS** **IN 2017**



**OF TOTAL PARTICIPANTS  
IDENTIFY AS ABORIGINAL OR  
TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER**



**OF CLUB-BASED  
INDIGENOUS PARTICI-  
PANTS PLAY IN NSW**

**426**  **REGISTERED COACHES** **IDENTIFY AS INDIGENOUS**

**143**  **REFEREES** **IDENTIFY AS INDIGENOUS**

Indigenous Australians have made a long and storied contribution to Australian football, weaving a thread through the game's history from the pioneering efforts of Charlie Perkins, John Moriarty and Harry Williams to the modern-day heroics of Lydia Williams and Kyah Simon. Indigenous players such as Jade North and Travis Dodd have captained their A-League clubs to success and joined the ranks of Aboriginal Socceroos. Emerging stars such as Jada Whyman and Shay Evans promise to write the next chapter.

These and other players embody the opportunity for mutual benefit between football and Indigenous Australia. Their clubs and national teams have achieved greater things for their involvement, while football has been a gateway to new experiences and opportunities for each of them. In addition, football has enhanced these players' standing as role models and activists in their communities.

Any admission that football can do better in its engagement with Indigenous Australia is not to ignore or diminish such heroes and their achievements, but to imagine a sport and a nation enriched

by five, ten, or fifty times as many Charlies, Jades and Lydias.

FFA has stated that football can, should and will do better.

The recent history of football's Indigenous journey could be described in three phases: emergence, stagnation, and renewal.

A structured, national approach first emerged a decade ago, around the same time as other sports. In May 2011, FFA held an Indigenous Planning Forum to generate ideas which would underpin its 2012-2017 Indigenous Football Development Strategy, titled Football Dreaming. This Strategy contained specific targets for increased participation by Indigenous players (25% increase targeted), coaches (25%) and referees (5%), increased Indigenous representation in elite pathway programs and youth national teams by 10% and senior national teams and professional leagues by 5%.

While the action items and timelines to achieve these targets were not as specific as those found in

Reconciliation Action Plans, this was a good start.

According to FFA, these commitments proved to be financially challenging and ultimately unsustainable. In a submission to this report, the national body said it shifted its strategic focus to growing revenues so that it can better fund these and other priorities, and that its revenues are a fraction of the likes of AFL and NRL, which are compared in these pages.

This diversion of focus has resulted in FFA being the only national sporting body of those analysed without a dedicated Indigenous page on its website, and FFA's 20-year strategic plan containing no Indigenous component.

FFA outlined recent activities which speak to the organisation's positive intentions towards Indigenous engagement, despite the admitted relative lack of investment, including:

- Partnering with JMF to advocate for federal funding to expand JMF's activities and increase training opportunities with elite clubs
- Logistical support for activations during the



- JMF-led annual Indigenous Football Week
- Matildas coach Alen Stajcic attending a JMF camp in Borroloola to scout talent
- Providing logistical and promotional support for the National Indigenous Football Championships and Australian Indigenous Football Championships
- Providing logistical and strategic support for tours to the World Indigenous Nations Games

In addition, it showed Indigenous grassroots players reported marginally higher satisfaction and retention likelihood than the broader participation base.

Moving forward, FFA is determined to make up for lost time. Staff are being repositioned with a renewed focus on Indigenous and multicultural engagement. Energy and resources have been channelled into forming meaningful partnerships with NGOs and governments, to drive social development outcomes. A new, dedicated government relations function has been created as part of this capacity-building phase designed to underpin future progress. FFA has flagged the creation of its first Reconciliation Action Plan as a consideration for its next four-year strategic cycle.

A few noteworthy initiatives by other members of the football ecosystem include Football Federation Victoria's initiation of its own Reconciliation Action Plan, Melbourne City's annual Indigenous Recognition Match and Adelaide United's adoption of an Indigenous-inspired kit for matches in Central Australia.

## JOHN MORIARTY FOOTBALL

Founded by the first Indigenous Soccerro John Moriarty and his son James in 2012, and managed by the Moriarty Foundation, JMF is football's most significant independent stakeholder in driving Indigenous engagement. JMF seeks to enhance social, health and education outcomes for Indigenous children aged 2-16 in remote communities through football. The programs employ Indigenous people and provide pathways for talented players to pursue football more seriously, which is beginning to bear fruit with the selection of JMF scholarship holder Shadeene Evans in the Young Matildas.

JMF also drives the annual Indigenous Football Week (IFW), a recognition and celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's contribution to football. IFW is delivered in partnership with FFA, Professional Footballers Australia (PFA) and media partners. JMF is funded by charitable donations and government funding. In 2016, as part of IFW, Soccerroos players donated match fees of approximately \$90,000 to JMF, while in 2018, the PFA will donate \$50,000.

JMF received international recognition with a top 3 finish in the FIFA 2018 Diversity Award, the first Australian initiative to be included.

# TAHJ

“

Tahj's grandmother is of Torres Strait islander descent. He began playing at the age of five for the Avoca Sharks and by age nine Tahj was selected to play in the Central Coast Mariners Skills Acquisition Program. Tahj was able to play representative futsal for the Central Coast and was fortunate to gain selection in the Australian team. Tahj has toured New Zealand, China, Hawaii and Malaysia playing futsal.

He has been able to experience many different cultures and make new friends through the sport. His tour of Hawaii was particularly interesting as he was able to learn a great deal about Polynesian culture as he visited local schools and villages.

Tahj is very proud of his Indigenous heritage and looks up to players such as Jade North who have succeeded in the A-League for a number of years. Tahj's uncle works closely with the Indigenous community in Macksville and whenever Tahj visits his cousins he always takes a soccer ball with an open invite for any kids nearby who want to play.

Encouraging your child to enjoy the game and always have a ball at their feet at home and to play for fun with their friends is the best way that soccer can be promoted in the Indigenous community.

If one day Tahj is fortunate enough to succeed in soccer it will be through persistence and not giving up. As Tahj's parents we will support his dream to become a professional player but also promote the importance of his education as he continues his journey.

”

**FATHER OF TAHJ, AGE 12**





# AFL

SNAPSHOT:

# 100,000

INDIGENOUS  
PARTICIPANTS



INDIGENOUS  
PLAYERS  
ON AFL LISTS



INDIGENOUS  
PLAYERS  
ON AFLW LISTS



# 52%

INCREASE IN  
INDIGENOUS  
UMPIRES



## PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES

### SIR DOUG NICHOLLS INDIGENOUS ROUND

Annual round recognising and celebrating Indigenous players and culture since 2007. All clubs wear special Indigenous-themed guernseys during games. The AFL estimates its Indigenous Round has a reach of 25 million people. Sir Doug Nicholls played 54 games for Fitzroy and was the first Aboriginal person to be knighted, also serving as Governor of South Australia.

### INDIGENOUS ALL-STARS CAMP

All Indigenous players from across the AFL are invited to a special camp combining high-performance training with cultural celebration and strengthening.

### FLYING BOOMERANGS AND WOOMERAS

National programs for under 16 males and females using football to facilitate personal, cultural, leadership and talent development.

### MALE AND FEMALE DIVERSITY CHAMPIONSHIPS

Annual week-long tournaments giving opportunities to players from Indigenous and diverse backgrounds, including potential selection for the Flying Boomerangs and Woomeras, in addition to coaching and umpire academies for Indigenous and multicultural people.

### NEXT GENERATION ACADEMIES

Academies for young males delivered by AFL clubs in either Indigenous or multicultural communities to introduce the sport and build social skills. 7000 participants aged 11-15 and 168 aged 16-18.

### JIM STYNES SCHOLARSHIP

Federally-funded scholarship available to promising 15-19-year-old players from Indigenous, multicultural or socially-isolated communities, to assist with education, transition-to-work, or pursuit of professional playing career.

### FOOTY MEANS BUSINESS

Two one-week residential camps for 50 young Indigenous men focusing on education, training and employment opportunities. Participants are exposed to the environment of a professional AFL player and have the opportunity to play the curtain-raiser to Dreamtime at the G between Richmond and Essendon.

### COMMUNITY AMBASSADORS

Network of 261 volunteers focusing on engaging Indigenous and multicultural communities.

## AFL RAP HIGHLIGHTS

The AFL's RAP ran from 2014-2016, and has been followed up by the adoption of RAPs by each of the league's clubs.

### AIMS

- Improve participation
- Build partnerships
- Create employment opportunities
- Acknowledge and celebrate

### SELECTED ACTIONS

- Establishment of an AFL National Indigenous Advisory Group
- Development of a suitable cultural awareness and education program for the AFL community
- Celebrate, support and encourage all AFL employees, in particular Indigenous employees, to engage in significant cultural activities such as Reconciliation and NAIDOC week events
- Explore the option of providing AFL leaders with first hand experiences in Indigenous programs and communities to further develop respect and understanding
- Conduct formal Acknowledgement and Welcome to Country ceremonies at major AFL events
- All AFL offices to display the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flag and/or acknowledgement statement
- Identify key category areas for Indigenous supplier engagement and preferred suppliers
- Prepare and publish a yearly progress report in the AFL Annual Report

# MERRYYN

“

I have been associated with remote education in an Indigenous community for the past three years. During this time, a highlight for the students of Robinson River has been their involvement with John Moriarty Football. This has involved a trained soccer coach and Indigenous support coaches travelling 150km to visit us, usually twice a week. As soon as their troop pulls through the gate, across the school you can hear shouts of “Soccer are here!”

Each session sees the students practicing specific skills and developing their footwork. The games are then played, where the students are encouraged to practice these and many other skills they have learned throughout the years. An important part is also the teaching of being “good sports” and playing fairly. Handshakes, helping their team members after a fall and saying positive remarks of encouragement and support are all part of the expectations.

I must admit that I might be a little biased, but the children at Robinson River have developed into incredibly

talented soccer players. This has given many of our students more confidence in themselves, not just in their soccer ability but in other areas of their life too.

JMF have also opened the door for a brighter future through the scholarships they offer to some of our students. Although this has proved very challenging for some children, as they find it difficult to be so far away from home and in a very different environment, it is an opportunity that is valued by the whole community. These scholarships are opening doors and allowing for different pathways through life, opportunities which would not otherwise occur.

”

**MERRYYN CURLEY**  
**Principal, Robinson River School, Northern Territory**





# RUGBY LEAGUE

## SNAPSHOT:

MORE  
THAN

**30,000**

REGISTERED PLAYERS ARE  
**INDIGENOUS**

**17%**

**12%**

OF NRL PLAYERS  
ARE FROM  
**INDIGENOUS  
DESCENT**



**29%**

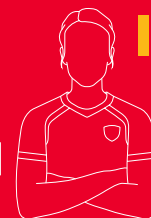
OF NATIONAL TEAM  
(KANGAROOS)  
PLAYERS ARE  
**INDIGENOUS  
MEN**

**INDIGENOUS CAPTAINS**

OF BOTH TEAMS IN

**2015 NRL GRAND FINAL**

**4**



**INDIGENOUS  
WOMEN**

PART OF THE  
VICTORIOUS 2017  
WORLD CUP SQUAD

**80%**

OF **ABORIGINAL  
& TORRES STRAIT  
ISLANDER PLAYERS**



**FEEL SUPPORTED  
AND HAVE A VOICE**

**27**

**6%  
OF  
STAFF**



**INDIGENOUS  
NRL EMPLOYEES**

## GOVERNANCE

### AUSTRALIAN RUGBY LEAGUE INDIGENOUS COUNCIL (ARLIC)

Multi-stakeholder group which oversees the implementation of the RAP and provides an Indigenous voice to decision-making

### NRL SENIOR INDIGENOUS PLAYERS ADVISORY GROUP

Five Indigenous NRL players selected by their peers to provide advice and guidance to NRL management and the ARLIC

## PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES

### INDIGENOUS EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY

Has led to over 5% of NRL staff being from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, after the first Indigenous employee joined in 2011. The program also includes training for non-Indigenous staff.

### ALL STARS GAMES

Special NRL season curtain-raiser which started in 2010. From 2019 will feature men's and women's Indigenous All Stars team against New Zealand Maori sides. Teams are selected by a fan vote.

### INDIGENOUS ROUND

A celebration of Indigenous culture involving various activations. All teams wear one off Indigenous-inspired jerseys, which is mandatory as part of the Club Licensing agreement.

### NRL INDIGENOUS PLAYERS CAMP

Cultural leadership camp for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander players in the NRL, plus other players who might benefit. Focus on mental wellbeing, career planning, cultural education and leadership skills.

### SCHOOL TO WORK PROGRAM

A full-time School to Work Project Officer oversees an award-winning program which has seen over 900 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students successfully completing their transition from school into higher education, training or employment since 2012. Federal funding announced in 2017 means that an additional 1500 students will be supported over three years.

### INDIGENOUS YOUTH LEADERSHIP SUMMIT

Sixty young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Year 11 students are selected to spend five days in camp where they get the opportunity to interact with other young leaders through a series of workshops, activities and discussions.

## NRL RAP HIGHLIGHTS

Rugby League's 2014-17 Reconciliation Action Plan – its third – achieved many of the outcomes and programs listed above. Another outcome was assisting NRL clubs to draft their own RAPs. The NRL is now kicking off its ambitious 2018-2022 RAP: the first Elevate-style RAP of any national sporting body.

### AIMS

- Drive social change in Indigenous communities
- Improve relationships between all Australians
- Embed reconciliation across whole of game
- Establish a coordinated effort across major sports

### SELECTED ACTIONS

- Embed the RAP into the NRL's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan
- Conduct a Fan Forum during All Stars week in the host city
- Employ an Indigenous Community & Player Engagement Manager
- NRL to organise three internal events during National Reconciliation Week
- Develop a social inclusion framework with the Australian Human Rights Commission that supports the NRL Member Protection Policy

- 100% of new staff will complete face-to-face cultural awareness training within their first six months
- All Commissioners and Executive to undertake a cultural immersion activity
- Acknowledgment of Country before every NRL game and on all staff email signatures
- Ensure all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff have career development plans focussed on progression and retention
- Engage with a minimum of five Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses to supply goods and services annually
- Assist ten Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to participate in targeted programs aimed at officiating and coaching at the elite level
- Include a monthly article on NRL website and social media platforms highlighting Indigenous achievement across the Game
- Organise at least three NRL matches each year in an area with a significant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population (outside of NRL club locations)

“

**Rugby League plays a critical role in building historical acceptance of past wrongs and equally as importantly a strong platform to celebrate success and strengthen relationships between all Australians**

”

**NRL Reconciliation Action Plan  
2018-2022**



# LYDIA

“

Growing up in Kalgoorlie, I didn't hear anything about football, it was always AFL. I moved to Canberra when I was 11. There wasn't really any AFL there, so I was playing football. If it wasn't for my mum getting a job in Canberra, I probably wouldn't be where I am today.

I actually grew up playing AFL with the Indigenous kids out in the desert. It was rough and tumble so I wasn't afraid to dive and get hurt or be on the ground. When I started playing football I didn't want to be goalkeeper at first, but it was just a natural fit throughout my career.

The West Coast Eagles players would come into Kalgoorlie. Most of the boys I grew up with went on to play AFL at some level. But obviously there wasn't an AFL competition for girls, so I would play every other sport but that. I started playing soccer at lunch time at school.

But I didn't know there was a pathway to a career for it. To be honest I didn't know who the Matildas were until I made my first Matildas camp! So I was kind of naïve and I was going along with the punches each year until my first tour with the national team when I was 16.

I've always loved travelling. It's something that I've done from a really young age and continued with football. I've got to see so many amazing places in the world that I would have otherwise not been able to see or afforded to go to. I could probably go to any place in the world and know someone.

Through football I have had the opportunity to study, to grow my knowledge and kind of just get out there. You can see another part of the world, learn about other cultures and make relationships that are going to last a lifetime. Football gives you a sense of community.

It's very hard to build a relationship with an Aboriginal community. The AFL have done well whereas football hasn't reached that yet. One camp or one appearance once a year is not going to build that relationship or encourage kids to play.

Another challenge is that they do not want to leave home. When my mum told me we were leaving Kalgoorlie for Canberra, I locked the door to my room and said 'I want new parents!'. So if we try to encourage

these kids to play the sport, they are going to have the exact same reaction.

Indigenous people are really athletic and when they take control of their abilities and ambitions, they can do anything. I think they have a unique skillset that is only inherited through their culture. A lot of that is untapped. You can see from the AFL what they can bring. I think it's cool that Indigenous footballers have an x-factor that no one can coach.

”

**LYDIA WILLIAMS,**  
**Matilda**



# CRICKET

## SNAPSHOT:

MORE THAN

**54,000**

**INDIGENOUS PARTICIPANTS**  
(UP FROM 36,900 IN 2017)

**7**

**INDIGENOUS MEN AND WOMEN**



**BIG BASH LEAGUES (2017-18)**



9.5%

**INDIGENOUS EMPLOYEES**



**AT CRICKET AUSTRALIA (2014)**

**NOTABLE PLAYERS**

**AUNTY FAITH THOMAS, JASON GILLESPIE (TESTS), ASH GARDNER, DAN CHRISTIAN, SCOTT BOLAND, D'ARCY SHORT (ODI & T20I)**



## GOVERNANCE

Local **Indigenous Cricket Advisory Committees** in each State and Territory feed into a **National Indigenous Cricket Advisory Committee** which has one of its co-chairs on the Cricket Australia board.

## PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES

### NATIONAL INDIGENOUS CRICKET CHAMPIONSHIPS

Annual week-long state versus state tournament held in Alice Springs each year, for male and female players, designed as both a celebration and as a talent accelerator.

### 150TH ANNIVERSARIES

Recreation of the historic Aboriginal XI tour of England in 1868 by current men's and women's teams, following matches and orations to commemorate the 1866 Aboriginal XI v Melbourne Cricket Club match at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

### A SPORT FOR ALL

Diversity and inclusion program "supporting more girls and women, multicultural, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and disability communities get involved in cricket". \$5m annual sponsorship from Commonwealth Bank.

### NATIONAL INDIGENOUS CRICKET STRATEGY FOR GAME AND MARKET DEVELOPMENT 2014/15-2017/18

Encompasses a number of programs including the National Indigenous Cricket Championships

### ANU RESEARCH PROJECT AND REPORT

University partnership to investigate Indigenous cricket in Australia

## CRICKET AUSTRALIA RAP HIGHLIGHTS

Cricket Australia is in the process of completing its first RAP, which ran from 2014-2018.

### SELECTED ACTIONS

- Have at least three Board Directors of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background across Australian Cricket Boards
- To provide three male and three female cricket scholarships for Indigenous cricketers to engage with specialist coaches through Cricket Australia's High Performance program
- Implement formal Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country ceremonies as part of Cricket Australia's events, all men's and women's international fixtures, KFC T20 Big Bash League (BBL) matches and formal meetings
- Engage employees, Board members and senior management in Australian Cricket in cultural awareness training through an online assessment portal
- Establish a calendar of significant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander events (e.g. NAIDOC) which Australian Cricket will actively celebrate.
- State and Territory cricket associations to become a member of Supply Nation in order to increased supplier diversity within Australian Cricket.
- Establish an Indigenous employment and development strategy



# JAMES

“

It all started when my old man bought me a soccer ball for a present. I'd tried playing rugby and it just wasn't for me. With soccer, I never loved it but I was OK at it and I just progressed along.

I had this privileged kind of upbringing in a way. I didn't really identify with the Indigenous side of my family at a young age because I associated it with all of the negative things that I saw and experienced. Looking back now, football actually gave me the opportunity to escape all the issues that came with that.

On the Tweed it is traditionally more of a rugby league area but there is a really big participation rate for soccer, especially among youth, so there were always academies and clinics going on. I was fortunate the path for me was relatively easy when compared to others. It was probably the proudest part of my career to sign with Gold Coast United and play in front of my friends and family.

I think soccer can be made more readily available to the Indigenous community, but it's sport in general – sport

offers a lot that nothing else can. Sport can teach a lot of things about health, wellbeing, discipline and you can show that if you work hard you can improve on things and apply that to other aspects of life too. It's a very unique way of delivering positive messages to youth; through engagement with people they see running around on TV.

Indigenous athletes also provide a good medium to deliver that cultural awareness to the broader population. I know other codes do it really well.

It took me until a couple of years ago to realise that me playing is not important; it's me seeing other people get the opportunity and fulfil their potential. I want to create more role models for the Indigenous community. I want to create some cultural change, empower people and try to address that disconnect we have with the Australian public.

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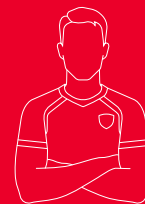
**JAMES BROWN,**  
**Former A-League Player**



# RUGBY UNION

**SNAPSHOT:**

# 14



**INDIGENOUS  
PLAYERS**

**HAVE REPRESENTED  
THE WALLABIES**

**(AS OF 2017)**

## LLOYD MCDERMOTT RUGBY DEVELOPMENT TEAM

Independent organisation, named after Lloyd McDermott, Indigenous Wallaby and first Aboriginal barrister. LMRDT holds an annual Indigenous Rugby Sevens tournament called the Ella 7s, with up to 44 teams participating and 2,000 people attending.

## PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES

### DEADLY 7S

National program for Indigenous primary school children combining rugby union discovery and cultural education. Over 5,000 students participated in 2016.

### MAJOR EVENTS

Welcome to Country performed before major events and 'message sticks' presented to visiting international teams. An Indigenous-designed jersey was worn in the third Bledisloe Cup match in 2017.

## AUSTRALIAN RUGBY UNION RAP HIGHLIGHTS

The ARU is working towards completion of its second RAP, covering 2016-18. During its first RAP, which commenced in 2013, all staff from the CEO down participated in cultural awareness activities to address an identified need to improve understanding of Indigenous Australia. The ARU has established a group of RAP Champions: internal staff who communicate RAP targets and achievements throughout the business.

### AIMS

- Increase Indigenous participation in rugby union
- Drive 'Close the Gap' outcomes through engagement with rugby

### SELECTED ACTIONS

- Organise one internal event and support one external event for National Reconciliation Week each year
- Develop relationships with government and community organisations including Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, and Local Aboriginal Land Councils
- Provide office space to LMRDT and staff to support Ella 7s carnival
- Investigate cultural training opportunities for RAP Working Group members, RAP Champions, HR Managers and other leadership and extend to Member Union (state) staff

- Welcome to Country at significant events such as Test Matches held in Australia
- Advertise all job vacancies in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media
- Develop a list of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses that can be used to procure goods and services
- Create profiles of Indigenous Wallabies on the ARU website
- Launch a targeted program engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, starting the participants on a pathway to ongoing engagement with the game
- Identify commercial partners with a shared vision to successfully engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in rugby
- Collaborate with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rugby greats to identify how ARU can increase engagement



**A report by Professional Footballers Australia on behalf of John Moriarty Football**