



# Australian rules football: *Australian Football League*

---

*'Football brings together people from all cultural backgrounds and all walks of life. Everyone is equal – united by their love of the game'.<sup>1</sup>*

**A**ustralian football is a strange paradox – for a game that is played almost exclusively in one part of the globe it is able to transcend cultural barriers and ethnic divides and bring communities together.

Australian Football League (AFL) CEO Andrew Demetriou said: “The game invites us all to be involved. We estimate we have more than 20 nationalities represented on our current playing lists and we are certain that this will continue to rise into the future as we welcome more people from more communities to the AFL.”<sup>2</sup>

The fact is more people are flocking to participate in Australian football than any other football code in Australia. A total of 539,526 registered participants played football in 2005 (a 4.6 % rise from 2004), and membership of the 16 AFL clubs reached a record 506,509 in 2005, the first time the 500,000 mark has been surpassed.<sup>3</sup>

Spectator support at games is also at record highs – the attendance record for the Toyota AFL premiership season of 6.28 million was set in 2005, up six per cent on 2004 figures. In addition, total attendances for the Wizard Home Loans Cup, Toyota AFL premiership season and Toyota AFL finals series passed seven million for the first time.<sup>4</sup>

On average, 4.02 million people watched AFL matches on television in 2005 (up 1.2 per cent on 2004), and the 2005 AFL grand final between the Sydney Swans and the West Coast Eagles was the most-watched television program in Australia that year, with an average audience in the five mainland capital cities of 3.386 million people.<sup>5</sup>

Like the spectacular marks which signify the game – Australian football is flying high.

## **The Aboriginal game**

Australian football and our nation’s first inhabitants share a rich intertwined history. In fact, many believe that the sport was developed from an Aboriginal game called *marngrook*.<sup>6</sup>

One of the purported founders of the game, Tom Wills, had a close relationship with Indigenous Australia – he spoke the language of the people with whom he grew up, the Tjapwurrung, he knew some of their dances, and the first games he played were with local Aboriginal children. It is also well documented that the Tjapwurrung played the Aboriginal football game *marngrook*.<sup>7</sup>

The first football club, Melbourne, was formed on August 7, 1858 – the year of the code’s first recorded match between Scotch College and Melbourne Grammar School. The game quickly

blossomed. The Geelong Football Club was established in 1859 and in 1866 an updated set of rules was put in place for a competition that started that year.

In 1896, the Victorian Football League (VFL) was established and the following year the league's first games were played among the foundation clubs – Carlton, Collingwood, Essendon, Fitzroy, Geelong, Melbourne, St Kilda and South Melbourne. In 1908, Richmond and University joined the competition (University left in 1914).<sup>8</sup>

In 1925, Hawthorn, Footscray (now the Western Bulldogs) and North Melbourne (now the Kangaroos) joined the VFL and the 12-team competition remained fundamentally unchanged until 1987. The only significant change during that period was when the South Melbourne Football Club relocated to Sydney in 1982 to become the Sydney Swans.

In 1987, the league expanded nationally in order to guarantee the growth and development of the game at all levels. Two interstate teams, West Coast (from WA) and Brisbane (from Queensland), joined an expanded VFL competition and started a transformation that would change the VFL into the modern national competition. In 1990, VFL was changed to the AFL (Australian Football League) to reflect the game's reach, which was cemented in 1991 when the Adelaide Crows (from South Australia) joined the AFL and in 1995, the Fremantle Dockers (from WA) were also welcomed.

At the end of 1996, the most recent changes in the structure occurred. Fitzroy merged with the Brisbane Bears to become the Brisbane Lions, playing home games out of Brisbane, and Port Adelaide became the 16th team to join the competition.<sup>9</sup>

## Australian Football League

The AFL is the peak body responsible for managing and administering Australian rules football. Its mission is to actively support all levels of football from juniors to the elite level. Operating as a non-profit organisation, it distributes the great proportion of its operating surplus – after administration and game development costs – to its constituent clubs.

The national body supports seven state and territory football bodies, 94 regional offices, 180 community football staff, over 2,400 AFL Auskick centres, 2,589 clubs fielding some 11,500 teams each week, 20,000 coaches and 9,200 umpires.<sup>10</sup> National objectives and strategies are delivered by the state bodies and adapted to meet local needs.

The AFL's infrastructure is divided into six key areas: football operations, finance and administration, game development, commercial operations, marketing and communications and broadcasting, strategy and major projects.

Game development is a very important area for the AFL. It provides broad national objectives and strategies across six core areas, including: participation, coaching and sports first aid, talent, umpiring, community development (including multicultural programs) and Indigenous programs and events. Last year the AFL invested \$23 million in grants via the state and territory football bodies to support the grass roots development of the game in communities throughout Australia. Total development investment by the AFL and its state affiliates is estimated to be more than \$50 million.<sup>11</sup>

Australian football is a remarkable entity. As an industry sector it generated \$2.67 billion in financial contribution to the Australian economy in 2003 and employs 6,400 people directly, excluding players, coaches and umpires. Remuneration paid to players, coaches, trainers and umpires accounted for the equivalent of another 5,600 full-time jobs.<sup>12</sup>

## Who plays AFL?

It is widely acknowledged that Australian rules football is Australia's pre-eminent football code in terms of numbers of players, non-playing membership of football clubs, spectator attendances at annual competitions and total impact on the Australian economy.

Over the past decade, the AFL and affiliated bodies have been developing their strategic planning and information systems in order to implement long-term programs for the enhancement of the game. Among these initiatives is a national census which has been conducted (by independent firm Street Ryan and Associates) on an annual basis since 1993 to monitor player participation rates across 94 development regions of Australia.



The census is compiled with the cooperative efforts of the peak Australian football organisations in each state and territory. These organisations are responsible for recording the number of teams and/or registered players within their jurisdiction for each Australian football program area, including: AFL *Auskick* (the entry level program for children), club football (encompassing junior, youth and open classifications), school football (encompassing primary and secondary schools), recreational football programs, veterans football and women's football.

The census only includes formal participants and players in organised competitions and programs. It does not include football matches or competitions arranged by organisations other than football clubs, associations, or schools, nor does it include participants in social/informal football activities.

## 2005 Census

In 2005, the National Census of Australian Football was compiled for 93 regions; 39 metropolitan and 54 country regions.

There were 491,689 actual players in Australian football competitions (of at least six weeks duration) and the AFL *Auskick* Program in 2005. This was an increase of 32,722 (or 7.1% on 2004).<sup>13</sup>

The actual players in 2005 were:

- 139,549 in AFL *Auskick* programs,
- 265,157 in club football (who were not also involved in AFL *Auskick*),
- 71,171 in school programs (who were not involved in either club or AFL *Auskick* programs),
- 4,973 in veterans football competitions,
- 9,530 in women's football competitions,
- 1,297 in recreational football programs.<sup>14</sup>

In 2005, there were 2,589 football clubs in Australia; 1,044 in metropolitan areas and 1,545 in country regions. These clubs fielded 11,352 competition teams comprising 4,089 junior teams, 3,984 youth teams and 3,279 open teams.<sup>15</sup>

The number of school teams competing in Australia grew to 5,024 in 2005 (3,300 primary school teams and 1,724 secondary school teams) – a 6.4 per cent increase on 2004.<sup>16</sup>

The census results also revealed that:

- 7.7% of football players in 2005 were girls and women,
- 6.7% of football players in 2005 were people of non-English speaking origin, and
- 3.5% of football players in 2005 were Aboriginals or Torres Strait Islanders.<sup>17</sup>

The AFL has set a target of 700,000 participants in Australian football by 2011 – an increase of 25 per cent.<sup>18</sup>

The AFL is also maintaining a considered strategy towards international markets. Through its game development department, it successfully promoted and administered an International Cup series in 2005 involving 10 AFL playing nations. It has also lent limited support to individuals or organisations developing competitions overseas through materials and outlines on how to develop a competition.<sup>19</sup>

### Indigenous participation

In AFL history, only 155 players known to be of Aboriginal descent have played AFL football. The first known player of Aboriginal descent to play at AFL level was Fitzroy's Joe Johnson, who played 55 games, including premierships in 1904 and 1905. Geelong's Graham 'Polly' Farmer, who revolutionised the game with his use of handball and was named in the AFL Team of the Century, and Carlton's Syd Jackson were stars of the 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>20</sup>

However, it has taken great courage for many Aboriginal players to play Australian football as they have had to overcome racial prejudices and a lack of cultural awareness in order to excel at their chosen sport. With innovations such as the AFL's Racial and Religious Vilification Rule and the leadership and actions of people such as Essendon's Michael Long, former Brisbane player and assistant coach Michael McLean and former St Kilda and Western Bulldogs player Nicky Winmar (the first player of Aboriginal descent to play 250 AFL games), the football community has gained a greater understanding of the issues confronting Aboriginal players. Their achievements have also made them role models for other Indigenous people.

In a recent speech AFL CEO Andrew Demetriou said: "From 1906–1980, records show there were only 18 players who claimed indigenous heritage to have played in the Victorian Football League".<sup>21</sup>

"This was not about racism on the field. This was about ignorance, about limiting opportunity, about a superiority complex. It's extraordinary to consider what a blight that is on our history, but there are much happier statistics to show how dramatic our attitudes have changed."<sup>22</sup>

In 2005, there are 52 Indigenous players on AFL lists representing about seven per cent of the total player list. This is more than enough top-class players to make a team of its own – a fact highlighted in the bi-annual matches played between the Aboriginal All-Stars and an AFL club in Darwin.<sup>23</sup>

In last year's AFL Draft ten per cent of players were Indigenous. This growth recognises the ability of players of Aboriginal descent, the success of the AFL's Indigenous community programs and the commitment of clubs to recruit them.<sup>24</sup>

An Indigenous player with the Brisbane Lions, Chris Johnson, summed it up: “The way the game has embraced us, they know we’re electric and a pretty exciting bunch, they know if they can get two or three Aborigines in their team, they know there’s something special going to happen”.<sup>25</sup>

The 2005 National Census of Australian Football Participation revealed that 3.5% of football players in 2005 were Aborigines or Torres Strait Islanders.<sup>26</sup> (see Table 1).

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders				% of Players
	5–12	13–18	19–39	Total	
New South Wales/ACT	987	217	182	1,386	2.4%
Northern Territory	2,393	1,149	1,473	5,015	37.4%
Queensland	2,454	538	136	3,128	5.5%
South Australia	709	491	556	1,755	2.6%
Tasmania	15	134	112	261	0.9%
Victoria	1,317	729	600	2,647	1.4%
Western Australia	1,452	898	571	2,921	3.9%
<b>Total Australia</b>	<b>9,327</b>	<b>4,156</b>	<b>3,629</b>	<b>17,113</b>	<b>3.5%</b>

### A multicultural tradition

Australian football has a long tradition of multicultural players. Wally Koochew was the league’s first Chinese footballer who defied the White Australia Policy to play for Carlton in 1908. Great names from the past are easy to rattle off: Ron Barassi, Peter Daicos, Carl Ditterich, Robert DiPierdomenico, Glen Jakovich, Alex Jesaulenko, Sam Kekovich, Tony Liberatore, Wayne Schimmelbusch, Sergio and Stephen Silvagni, Paul Van Der Haar and Murray Weideman to name a few.<sup>27</sup>

Then there are today’s stars, including: Scott Camporeale, Josh Francou, Anthony Koutoufidis, Daniel Giansiracusa, Angelo Lekkas, Paul Licuria, Matthew Pavlich, Simon Prestigiacomo, Peter Riccardi, Mark Ricciuto, Nick Riewoldt, Saverio and Anthony Rocca, Richie Vandenberg and Brett and Michael Voss, who have all made significant contributions to football. Even the AFL’s Chief Executive Officer, Andrew Demetriou, hails from an ethnic background – the son of Cypriot parents who migrated to Australia more than 50 years ago.<sup>28</sup>

The 2005 National Census of Australian Football Participation revealed that 6.7% of football players in 2005 were people of non-English speaking origin.<sup>30</sup>

	People of Non-English Speaking Origin				% of Players
	5–12	13–18	19–39	Total	
New South Wales/ACT	701	230	265	1,196	2.09%
Northern Territory	535	197	134	866	6.17%
Queensland	277	178	116	571	1.01%
South Australia	2,108	1,003	585	3,697	5.57%
Tasmania	230	61	6	297	1.03%
Victoria	13,396	7,045	4,351	24,792	12.83%
Western Australia	765	471	98	1,334	1.77%
<b>Total Australia</b>	<b>18,012</b>	<b>9,186</b>	<b>5,556</b>	<b>32,754</b>	<b>6.66%</b>

While the AFL has had many star players from various European backgrounds, Andrew Demetriou says it is a different story among Australia's Asian and African communities.

"There are certainly parts of the community we haven't had much success in at all. It would be terrific if we could start to recruit some players out of the Asian community. We can see some real potential in the African community," he said.<sup>31</sup>

### **Increasing participation**

One of the AFL's main objectives is to 'aggressively drive high levels of participation in well-managed community programs for all people throughout Australia'.<sup>32</sup> The AFL and state and territory football bodies do this in earnest, invested more than \$30 million in the development of Australian football in 2005 through strategies and programs designed to grow the game at the community level. This level of investment has seen the number of players increase by 102,000 in the past five years, creating a major challenge for the game to cater for this level of growth.<sup>33</sup>

Considerable additional infrastructure has been required to support such growth in terms of facilities, uniforms, volunteers, coaches and umpires even in football's heartlands. Participation growth is most clearly evident in New South Wales and the ACT, where numbers have risen from 38,497 in 2000 to 61,201 in 2005, and in Queensland, where numbers have more than doubled from 30,120 in 2000 to 62,599 in 2005.<sup>34</sup>

### **AFL community camps**

The AFL's community camps have become an integral component of the AFL's commitment to connect directly with local communities. Each February, AFL clubs take their full player list to specific locations for three-to-four-day camps. This gives local residents direct contact with AFL players and club officials at senior training sessions, practice matches, AFL *Auskick* sessions and local promotions.

During the 2005 AFL community camps, coaches and players reached 80,000 students in 422 primary and secondary schools, and 8000 children attended AFL Superclinics. Players visited 3,700 people in hospitals and aged-care facilities and 4,500 people attended functions that raised more than \$83,000 for local communities.<sup>35</sup>

AFL players were more active in the community than ever before due to the joint planning undertaken by AFL clubs and their players with state and regional development staff, devoting more than 15,000 hours to community visits.<sup>36</sup>

### **Increasing growth overseas**

More than 10,000 people in 12 countries (Canada, Denmark, Great Britain, Ireland, Japan, Nauru, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, South Africa, Spain and the United States) are participating in well-structured Australian rules football competitions that are formally affiliated with the AFL. Several countries also conduct very successful school and AFL *Auskick* programs.

The AFL program in South Africa has grown to about 50 clubs with 2,500 youngsters playing under-14 and under-16 football. The AFL has increased its commitment to the South African market with four South Africans appointed to drive the growth of the game. Officials are confident participation will reach 10,000 over the next few years.<sup>37</sup>

As part of their efforts to promote the game on the international stage, the second Australian Football International Cup, involving 10 countries (New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, United States, Ireland, Samoa, Great Britain, Canada, South Africa, Japan and Spain) with teams comprised entirely of nationals, was held in Victoria in August 2005.

Thirty matches were played over 11 days at six venues, with New Zealand 7.8 (50) beating Papua New Guinea 5.2 (32) in the grand final. The next International Cup will be held in 2008 as part of Australian Football's centenary celebrations.<sup>38</sup>

### Junior development

The Carter Report titled '*Investing in the Future of Australian Football* (October 2001)', identified segment gaps in Australian football and its demographic reach. The research found that it did not have a version of the game to cater for the growing recreational participation market. As a result, *AFL Recreational Football* was developed.<sup>39</sup>

This non-contact game is played between two teams of eight with an unlimited number of interchange players, on a field with a maximum length of 100 metres by 50 metres wide.

*Recreational Football* is designed so that everyone can play; it is less physically demanding; has a minimal time commitment; has no risk of serious injury; and has a major emphasis on fun and safety. The game is played in a friendly social environment and enables people of all ages, sexes and abilities to participate.<sup>40</sup>

### Auskick

*AFL Auskick* is the key introductory coaching program for primary school aged children and their parents. It is played in a fun, safe, community environment managed by parents and other volunteers. The program consists of a skill program of graded warm-up games, skill activities, skill games and a match program based on *Auskick* rules.

The program runs for a minimum of 10 weeks. In addition to the coaching and playing experience, each child receives a package that includes a football, cap, membership card, CD ROM, poster, book, backpack and skills guide.

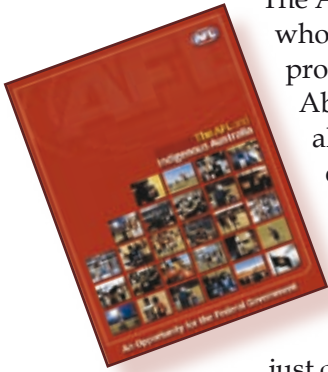
Registered participants in *AFL Auskick* program rose by 74 % from 80,074 in 2000 to 139,549 in 2005. There are 18,000 volunteers who run the program in 2,426 *AFL Auskick* centres and around 23,000 children and young umpires participated in *AFL Auskick* during half-time of premiership matches.<sup>41</sup>

### Schools resources

The AFL has produced a range of quality resources for schools to integrate Australian football activities into the school curriculum. These curriculum learning activities are designed for early, middle and adolescent years and are provided across a number of key learning areas.

The resources include: 'AFL sport education', 'AFL – our national game', 'Eat well play well', 'AFL heritage' and an AFL multicultural schools resource 'Welcome to the AFL'.<sup>42</sup>

### AFL Indigenous programs



The AFL is a leader in community relations, particularly with the Indigenous community, who have always been drawn to the game and its culture. The AFL has developed many programs and policies to enhance this relationship and provide opportunities for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to participate in the game. They have also used the strength of AFL and its heroes to increase awareness of programs in education, health, safety, and welfare.

The AFL's Indigenous programs are managed centrally, with a current investment of around \$3 million. This significant financial commitment and holistic approach to address the priorities of Indigenous communities has the potential to bring about generational change and make a real impact. The AFL states that they don't just deliver a sport program, 'our aim is to reach communities and leave a legacy resulting in lifetime behavioural change'.<sup>43</sup> Following are a range of programs and events developed to achieve this goal.

### Kickstart program

The AFL *Kickstart* commenced in 1997 in the Northern Territory, the Kimberley region of Western Australia and North Queensland, and is now conducted in all states and territories.

The program consists of five key integrated elements, including: health, education, participation, partnerships and community capacity building. The program provides:

- opportunities for boys and girls to play the game
- a focus on education and attendance at school
- forums on health and social issues (petrol sniffing, alcoholism, substance abuse, men's health, community values)
- road safety forums (via local police), and
- participation for females in AFL *Auskick* programs and linkages to netball.<sup>44</sup>

School participation is paramount and benefits (posters, footballs, caps, backpacks with an AFL theme) are provided to those who attend and participate in the programs.

All programs are developed with local communities in leadership and co-ordination roles and link closely with local and state governments, small and large business, authorities and institutions. Many of the messages are delivered directly or via promotional material by high profile AFL Indigenous heroes, including: Michael Long (Essendon), Andrew McLeod (Adelaide) and Daryl White (Brisbane Lions). The consistent message through the program is: 'strong culture, strong spirit, strong community'.

Research conducted by the Curtin University Indigenous Research Centre in 2000, showed that the AFL *Kickstart* program increased: self-esteem and confidence; community cohesion and sense of purpose; individual well being and awareness of healthy lifestyle issues and;



school attendance and academic achievement. The research also showed that the program decreased: community level vandalism; alcohol and substance abuse and; anti-social behaviour and crime at public events and locations.<sup>45</sup>

## Auskick program

A major component of AFL *Kickstart* is AFL *Auskick* – the AFL’s national introductory development program for primary school-aged children. Supported by the Australian Sports Commission, the program has made deep inroads into Indigenous communities.

Through the provision of education and training, communities are empowered to manage their own AFL *Auskick* centres, making the programs sustainable and providing them with a sense of ownership.

A key feature of the 2005 AFL *Auskick* calendar was the launch of the AFL *Auskick* Grand Final competition – the biggest competition in the program’s history. One AFL *Auskick* participant and a parent from each of the 91 development regions across Australia was able to join in the grand final parade, in grand final pre-match entertainment and in half-time grid games.

Another highlight in 2005 was the AFL *Auskick* Celebrity Match held at the Gabba during ‘Family Round’ (round 14). In another *Auskick* ‘first’, the AFL strengthened its relationship with Netball Australia by showcasing *Netta* (Netball Australia’s junior participation program) at half-time in AFL games at all venues during ‘Family Round’.

The AFL *Auskick* Roadshow, hosted by Ambassador Robert ‘Dipper’ DiPierdomenico, continued to promote the program in regional Australia. The roadshow consisted of major events and clinics for more than 22,000 children.<sup>46</sup>

## Clontarf Academy

The AFL is working with the Clontarf Foundation to develop and expand an academy concept for young Indigenous men based on the successful model established in Western Australia.

The foundation believes that a failure to experience achievement when young, coupled with a position of under-privilege, can lead to alienation, anger and more serious consequences. As a prelude to tackling these issues, participants in the academy are first provided with an opportunity to succeed through Australian football. The Academy program aims to improve the discipline, life skills and self-esteem of young Aboriginal men.<sup>47</sup>

## Showcase events

The AFL has developed a range of events to showcase the skills of Indigenous players, at junior and elite levels, while also celebrating the importance and influence of Aboriginal culture.

A regular pre-season match between an AFL club and the Indigenous AFL All Stars in Darwin showcases the skills of Aboriginal footballers from the AFL and those with the potential to make it to the big league. In the week before the game, the visiting AFL club conducts a community camp featuring clinics, club and hospital visits, and leadership courses.

Other showcase events include: the annual Sydney vs Essendon match at Telstra Stadium for the Marngrook Trophy; 'Dreamtime at the G' played between Richmond and Essendon; and the first NAIDOC-themed match between Richmond and Essendon in round 15, 2005, at the MCG.

The AFL also supports the National Indigenous Championships played between all states and territories, and state-based championships for primary, secondary and youth championships in central Australia, far north Queensland, and the Northern Territory.

The Regional Schools Championships have been held at primary level in far north Queensland (Crusader Cup), Northern Territory (Michael Long Cup), Western Australia (David Wirrpunda Cup); while at secondary level, the championships play for the Andrew McLeod Cup (Northern Territory) and the Darryl White Cup (far north Queensland).<sup>48</sup>

### Developing opportunities

The AFL aims to increase support for Indigenous players in their transition from junior football to the national competition, and to provide opportunities in work and education. They achieve this through the following programs:

- The AFL and the AFL Players' Association conduct an annual camp program for Indigenous players in November. The program addresses issues of transition (leaving home), welfare and education, and provides links to other training and personal development programs to plan for life after football.
- The AFL provides funding for the AFL Group Training Company (AFL SportsReady) to increase the education and training of boys and girls. AFL SportsReady provides opportunities for Indigenous youth to undertake traineeships.
- The AFL introduced an inaugural Community Award in 2004, which was awarded to David Wirrpunda from the West Coast Eagles for work done in Aboriginal communities across Western Australia. The AFL Players Association also presents the MarnGrook Award which recognises an up and coming Indigenous player.
- The AFL Rising Stars Program provides an elite player pathway for Indigenous youth. Regional carnivals and camps form vital links between participation programs and the talented player pathway.<sup>49</sup>

### Future goals

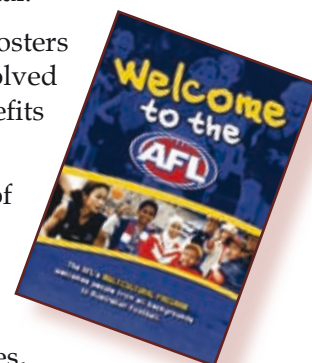
The AFL is looking to expand its programs and initiatives to reach further into Indigenous Australia and build on its existing results.

They state: 'the demand for Australian football and the success of our programs has resulted in the capacity of our development network being stretched. We need to expand our broad-based AFL *Kickstart* Program and the Clontarf Academy model, as two key initiatives'.<sup>50</sup>

The AFL considers that further investment is required to enhance the current level of resource provision and to develop new initiative resources, including:

- *School curriculum* - to engage Indigenous children in learning and improving truancy levels, the AFL want to develop further relevant school curriculum resources for all key learning areas themed around Australian football.

- *Equipment* – to directly engage Indigenous youth in sport and physical activity, the provision of footballs, handball targets, portable goalposts and jumpers are vital.
- *Communication collateral* – there is a need to develop and distribute role model posters and videos featuring targeted messages relating to education, the dangers involved in drug and alcohol misuse, codes of conduct, and the health and wellbeing benefits of active participation.
- *Educational resources* – to build community capacity, the provision of administration and coaching manuals, CD-Roms and videos designed and tailored to accommodate numeracy and literacy levels is vital, to complement the practical course delivered by the AFL’s development network.<sup>51</sup>



In summing up the remarkable number and extent of the AFL’s Indigenous policies, programs and events, Michael Long said: “Through connecting people from diverse backgrounds at a local football club, the game of Australian football contributes significantly to the social fabric and health and wellbeing of all people, in all communities. I am proud of the role the AFL, and Australian football, has taken in changing attitudes, and bringing Australians together in harmony”.<sup>52</sup>

### Introducing migrants, new arrivals and refugee groups to the game

One of the biggest differences in today’s environment is the varied and diverse amount of choices people have with their leisure pursuits. It is not just Australian football, cricket or tennis any more – sports have to be much more strategic in their approach.<sup>53</sup> The AFL understands that over 120,000 new people have arrived in Australia over the past 10 years and they want them to get to know *their* game.

The AFL also recognises that Australian football has the capacity to bring together people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Through its multicultural program the AFL is building strong bonds with diverse communities to develop strategies to encourage their involvement in the game and in the wider community. The program is an initiative of the AFL and Football Victoria, established in partnership with the Victorian Government’s Department for Victorian Communities.

The three key objectives of the program are to:

1. introduce Australian football as part of settlement and integration;
2. implement community capacity building in culturally and linguistically diverse communities; and
3. influence community leagues and clubs to embrace multicultural diversity.<sup>54</sup>

The AFL has assembled a dedicated team through its Multicultural Program to assist and encourage migrant and refugee communities to access Australian football. Last year the AFL appointed their first Multicultural Project Coordinator and five multicultural development officers currently work within the Western Bulldogs, Hawthorn, Collingwood, Essendon and Richmond Football Clubs to implement the program in clubs and schools.



A range of resources and programs have been developed to help local leagues and clubs take action to ensure their activities are welcoming and inclusive of all cultures and that they are creating safe and family-friendly environments for people.

The Victorian Multicultural Commission identified that newly arrived immigrant and refugees are placed at a great social disadvantage when they first migrate to Australia. They often feel disconnected and isolated from Australian social experiences. The AFL hopes the Multicultural Football Program will combat this level of isolation and encourage refugees and immigrant young people to become involved with Australian football.

However, implementing a multicultural plan is not without its hurdles. Winning the confidence of the young players and their families, taking into consideration the problems of communication, transport, cultural background and explaining how Australian football is played, are just some of the challenges the AFL is facing.<sup>55</sup>

### Welcome to the AFL round

In an effort to introduce the game to more communities, including those recently arrived in the country or those not familiar with how it is played, matches played over the split round 12 from June 16–24, 2006, were part of the *'Welcome to the AFL'* themed promotion.

In launching the concept, CEO Andrew Demetriou said many immigrants found Australian football helped them become involved in the community and start conversations with people from different backgrounds.

"To many people football is a fantastic introduction to life in this country," Demetriou said. "People may not share the same language, same beliefs or same heritage, but they can join together and certainly share the same passion for a football club."<sup>56</sup>

Former Hawthorn player Angelo Lekkas, a Greek-Australian who grew up in Melbourne's northern suburbs, was the 2006 *'Welcome to the AFL'* Ambassador. He visited schools and community groups to educate young people about the values and benefits of playing team sports such as Australian football.

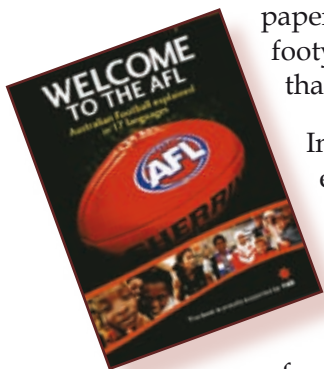
'What crystallized for me the broad appeal of Aussie Rules was a beautiful picture in the paper recently of a group of young Muslim Australian women making their way to the footy with team scarves over their hijabs - if pictures could tell a thousand words, well that one conveyed so much more,' Lekkas said.<sup>57</sup>

In addition, a booklet produced by the AFL to assist people become familiar with the essential elements of the game, was translated into 17 different languages and stitched into the Round 12 edition of the AFL Record.

The AFL also signed the Victorian Multicultural Commission's Community Accord as part of the launch of *'Welcome to the AFL'* round. The Community Accord is a document recognised by the Victorian Government and is an outward affirmation of community harmony. It emphasises respect for all ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic communities and the need to promote respect for diversity across the community. The AFL is the first sporting body to sign the Community Accord and joins the Victorian Police, the Lions Club International, and many local government and community groups who have done so.

### Visit to the G

As part of the AFL's Multicultural Football Program, the Western Bulldogs, the Victorian Multicultural Commission and the AFL invited young people and their families from



Victoria's culturally and linguistically diverse communities to attend a game of Australian football for the first time.

Approximately 450 people from the Libyan, Sudanese, Somali, Cambodian, Vietnamese, Ethiopian, Kenyan and Eritrean communities watched the Western Bulldogs play St Kilda on 3 July 2005 at the Melbourne Cricket Ground – as part of the AFL's 'Family Round'.

As part of the pre-game entertainment, an African band performed cultural songs using traditional instruments called *Krare* and *Mancinko* and wore traditional costumes.<sup>58</sup>

### Annual footy day at King Khalid Islamic College, Coburg

In April 2006, former Kangaroos player and Bali bombing survivor Jason McCartney visited an inner-Melbourne Islamic school under the AFL's Multicultural Program. Girls wearing traditional head scarfs and AFL team jumpers kicked footballs in a display of the game's cohesive role in society.

"It was a really good opportunity because there's been a lot of negative publicity about Muslims of late," McCartney said. "If I can come here after what I've been through and share my experiences and promote footy and healthy living and good values, hopefully that can contribute to understanding between groups".<sup>59</sup>

### Australian Football Multicultural Cup

Almost a quarter of Victoria's population was born overseas and come from over 200 countries. They speak over 180 languages and dialects and follow 116 religious faiths. To reflect this diversity, teams representing Melbourne's multicultural communities battled it out in June 2005 for the second Australian Football Multicultural Cup at Optus Oval.

The eight teams represented were: Australia (an all Indigenous team), Croatia, Israel, Lebanon, Greece, Italy, Vietnam and Turkey.

The one-day tournament, which began in 2004 as part of the federal Government's Harmony Day program, is designed to promote AFL football in a tournament that celebrates Melbourne's multiculturalism. The event was not held in 2006, primarily due to a clash with the 2006 Commonwealth Games being held in Melbourne, but is likely to return in 2007.

### Racism and AFL

In June 2005 a junior football coach was suspended for life from a Northern Melbourne League after an incident in which spectators screamed racist abuse at Sudanese boys. The under-12s coach was reportedly among a small group of adult spectators screaming taunts such as "Get back to where you came from, you little f . . . black bastards" at Maribyrnong Park players. The abuse continued even as the team posed for photos after the game.<sup>60</sup>

In another incident in the Western Region Football League in Victoria, a junior player with an African background was called 'nigger' and 'black f . . .' by an opponent.<sup>61</sup> As a result of these growing incidents, Football Victoria produced a new anti-racism pamphlet (to complement the 'Bouncing Racism out of sport' video) to almost 2,000 junior, amateur and women's club in 2006.

At an elite level, players such as Michael Long have been successful at raising an awareness of racism, however it seems the message has not reached some clubs, players and spectators at the grassroots level. Former sport and recreation project officer at the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues, Assunta Morrone, said: "The Essendon league incident highlights the fact that, for newly arrived communities, the fear of racism and discrimination in sport is still a reality and a barrier to participation".<sup>62</sup>

And the incidents are not restricted to the football field. Earlier this year, Brisbane Lions star Jason Akermanis had his regular radio show on Brisbane Indigenous radio network 4AAA axed after calling managers of the network "monkeys" during a live broadcast. Network Manager Tiga Bayles said: "I questioned does this bloke know what he's saying? Does this bloke know that this terminology has been used in racist societies across the country, across the world?"<sup>63</sup> This was followed by high-profile AFL football caller Rex Hunt describing Collingwood's Aboriginal player Leon Davis "as black as a dog" during a game in July.<sup>64</sup> Both men apologised, but it highlighted that racist language in sport remains a live issue.

Former AFL chief executives Ross Oakley and Wayne Jackson, who were responsible for implementing the league's code of conduct on racism, which covers both on-field incidents and racist remarks directed to players by members of the crowd, believe education has helped the AFL reduce racism from the field and from the terraces.

"We would always take every opportunity to promote our position on racism and that was through promotional brochures, putting information in the Football Record and talking publicly about it on TV and radio, so that no one is any doubt what our position is," Jackson said.<sup>65</sup>

There are a range of educational programs and material to reinforce this message. One of the best examples is *'Bouncing Racism out of Sport'*.

### Bouncing racism out of sport

A *'Bouncing Racism out of Sport'* booklet and DVD were developed by Cricket Victoria, Football Victoria and Netball Victoria in partnership with the Department of Victorian Communities. They combined resources and expertise to develop a comprehensive racial and religious tolerance education program which is available and distributed to clubs.

The education program includes two videos hosted by ex-AFL footballer Michael Long, which focus on ways to increase participation from diverse population groups in sport by minimising the risk of inappropriate behaviour, and by conducting activities that engender welcoming and harmonious environments.

In the introduction, Long (who is also Chairman of the Australian Indigenous Football Foundation) says: "Players often make racial comments because they feel the other player made them miss a mark, lose the ball or miss a shot at goal. Sometimes these comments are used as 'jokes' or to 'let off steam'. But there is no excuse; these comments are clearly either racial or religious vilification or both. The old line that 'what's said on the field stays on the field' is not acceptable anymore."<sup>66</sup>

"Leagues and clubs implementing the *'Bouncing Racism out of Sport'* virtues, will not only have a better chance to increase participation, but will enhance their image as valued family friendly community organisations."<sup>67</sup>



## Rule 30

Racial abuse between players on the field only attracted considerable attention by the sports' governing code and the media following the first ever formal complaint, lodged by Essendon's Michael Long in 1995 – and even this only became public following Long's dissatisfaction at the outcome of the hastily organized mediation.

Talking of the incident, Long said: "Anyone who knew me at that time knew I was a person of very few words, and someone who never wanted attention. It was about a much bigger cause than myself. It wasn't even about Indigenous Australia or white Australia. It was about the whole of Australia, and our future."<sup>68</sup>

"I got a lot of criticism and negative feedback over the whole saga – even some Indigenous players didn't agree with the stance I took – but I saw no other way to bring about change, real change. Here was a man, Damian Monkhorst, who didn't know anything about me – who I was, where I'm from, my family and cultural background – but in the blink of an eye he was willing to label me with those words."<sup>69</sup>

As a result, the AFL deemed that a system of education and resolution was required for such incidents. In 1995, they became the first sporting body in Australia to adopt procedures to deal with racial and religious vilification when they developed *Rule 30: A Rule to Combat Racial and Religious Vilification*.

Rule 30.1 states that 'No person subject to these Rules shall act towards or speak to any other person in a manner, or engage in any other conduct which threatens, disparages, vilifies or insults another person on the basis of that person's race, religion, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin'.<sup>70</sup>

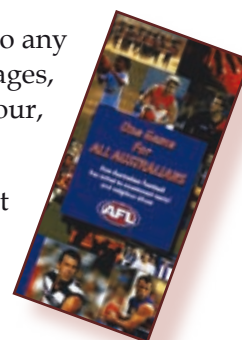
To reinforce its message to the football community that such behaviour is not acceptable, the AFL upgraded Rule 30 in the 1997 season to include new conditions for conciliation, education and confidentiality. The rule has new penalties, and its provisions extend to employees of AFL clubs with on-field access, as well as players.

Under the rule, an umpire, player or club can raise a complaint. Initially the matter is dealt with through confidential conciliation between the people involved, but if it cannot be resolved in that way, it is referred to the AFL Tribunal or the AFL Commission for determination. After a first offence, the AFL Complaints Officer may send any complaint about a player straight to the Tribunal or the AFL Commission.

Michael Long said: "The AFL's racial and religious vilification rule doesn't just cover Indigenous players; it's for everyone of all colours, races, and religions. It doesn't only apply to football: it's the way we must live".<sup>71</sup>

## Education and conciliation

The AFL believes that racial and religious abuse is best tackled by education and conciliation. They also recognise that they have an opportunity and responsibility to relay the message to the public and raise community awareness that vilification at any level is unacceptable. As such, clubs are required to conduct annual education programs for all players, coaches, officials and other employees.



A complaint can be brought by an umpire, a player or a club. Initially the matter is dealt with through confidential conciliation between the people involved. The conciliation is held in confidence to give all parties the opportunity to come together face-to-face to resolve their differences with the assistance of a suitable independent person appointed by the AFL Commission upon agreement between the parties.

Any person alleged to have contravened the rule, and attending conciliation for the first time (whether the conciliation resolves the issue or not) is required to attend an approved education program in relation to racial and religious vilification. If the conciliation fails, the meeting remains private – nothing said or done during conciliation is used as evidence before the Tribunal or the AFL Commission.

### Penalties

Penalties are determined by the AFL Tribunal or AFL Commission and all matters discussed in conciliation hearings remain confidential. Any offences under this confidentiality agreement can elicit fines of up to \$20,000 for a first offence, and up to \$40,000 for subsequent offences. If a complaint is proven at the tribunal or before the AFL Commission, a club can be fined up to \$50,000. Fines will not apply when it is seen that a club has taken all reasonable steps to prevent offences by its employees.<sup>72</sup>

### Coaches code of conduct

Australian football coaches (and officials who appoint them) are becoming increasingly aware that, as members of the wider community and the sports industry, they have legal and ethical obligations to present themselves in public in accordance with acceptable standards of behaviour.

The coaches code of conduct states: 'I will respect the rights, dignity and worth of all individuals within the context of my involvement in Australian football, including refraining from any discriminatory practices on the basis of race, religion, ethnic background, or special ability/disability' and 'I will display and foster respect for umpires, opponents, coaches, administrators, other officials, parents and spectators'.<sup>73</sup>

Study of the code is an integral part of AFL coach accreditation courses and coaches are required to sign their agreement to comply with the code as part of the accreditation process. Increasingly, clubs and leagues are reinforcing codes of behaviour for coaches and other participants at the local level as part of a drive to improve the quality of club environments.<sup>74</sup>

### National umpiring cultural awareness policy

This policy was developed as part of the AFL Umpire's Association *Whistling in Harmony* program, which was made possible by the provision of a grant from the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) *Living in Harmony* initiative.

As well as being posted on their website, 500 copies of the policy have been distributed to all controlling bodies and umpiring organisations nationally. They urge all groups to adopt the policy and implement its recommendations on an ongoing basis.



One of the challenges faced by the Umpire's Association is to ensure that the art of umpiring is fostered and nurtured, and that those people who umpire are appreciated, recognized and respected. The association considers that through implementing the policy the desired attitudinal change and resultant cultural shift in the manner in which people who umpire are treated will be achieved quickly and effectively.<sup>75</sup>

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> AFL CEO Andrew Demetriou in the *'Welcome to the AFL'* book.
- <sup>2</sup> *'Welcome to the AFL'* by George Farrugia in the AFL Record, Round 12, 16-24 June 2006.
- <sup>3</sup> AFL 2005 Annual Report at <http://afl.com.au/cp2/c2/webi/image/014940ay.pdf>.
- <sup>4</sup> AFL 2005 Annual Report at <http://afl.com.au/cp2/c2/webi/image/014940ay.pdf>.
- <sup>5</sup> AFL 2005 Annual Report at <http://afl.com.au/cp2/c2/webi/image/014940ay.pdf>.
- <sup>6</sup> *The AFL and Indigenous Australia* booklet.
- <sup>7</sup> *'Tom Wills: the Original Spirit'* by Martin Flanagan in the Spirit of Football Quarterly Journal Issue 1, winter 2004. P16.
- <sup>8</sup> <http://afl.com.au/default.asp?pg=history>.
- <sup>9</sup> <http://afl.com.au/default.asp?pg=afinfosheets&spg=display&articleid=240727>.
- <sup>10</sup> AFL Australian football is No.1 flyer.
- <sup>11</sup> <http://afl.com.au/cp2/c2/webi/image/014940fk.pdf>.
- <sup>12</sup> *The AFL and Indigenous Australia* booklet.
- <sup>13</sup> 2005 National Census of Australian Football Participation.
- <sup>14</sup> 2005 National Census of Australian Football Participation.
- <sup>15</sup> 2005 National Census of Australian Football Participation.
- <sup>16</sup> 2005 National Census of Australian Football Participation.
- <sup>17</sup> 2005 National Census of Australian Football Participation.
- <sup>18</sup> <http://afl.com.au/default.asp?pg=printerfriendly&spg=default&articleid=298770>.
- <sup>19</sup> <http://afl.com.au/default.asp?pg=afinfosheets&spg=display&articleid=241067>.
- <sup>20</sup> <http://afl.com.au/default.asp?pg=afinfosheets&spg=display&articleid=240718>.
- <sup>21</sup> *'The Glue that Brings us Together: combating racism in sport'*, speech by Andrew Demetriou at the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Human Rights Oration, 9 December 2005.
- <sup>22</sup> *'The Glue that Brings us Together: combating racism in sport'*, speech by Andrew Demetriou at the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Human Rights Oration, 9 December 2005.
- <sup>23</sup> <http://afl.com.au/default.asp?pg=afinfosheets&spg=display&articleid=240718>.
- <sup>24</sup> <http://afl.com.au/default.asp?pg=afinfosheets&spg=display&articleid=240718>.
- <sup>25</sup> *'Rivals they may be, but these players are brothers in arms'* by Chloe Saltau in the Sun Herald, 25 June 2006.
- <sup>26</sup> 2005 National Census of Australian Football Participation.
- <sup>27</sup> *'Together as one'* by Nick Hatzoglou at <http://afl.com.au/cp2/c2/webi/article/216930ad.pdf>.
- <sup>28</sup> *'Together as one'* by Nick Hatzoglou at <http://afl.com.au/cp2/c2/webi/article/216930ad.pdf>.
- <sup>29</sup> *'Welcome to the AFL'* launch speech by Andrew Demetriou at Melbourne Town Hall, 5 June 2006.
- <sup>30</sup> 2005 National Census of Australian Football Participation.
- <sup>31</sup> <http://www.smh.com.au/news/Sport/AFL-wants-to-break-more-race-barriers/2006/03/07/1141493649855.html>.
- <sup>32</sup> <http://afl.com.au/cp2/c2/webi/image/014940cv.pdf>.
- <sup>33</sup> AFL Australian football is No.1 flyer.
- <sup>34</sup> <http://afl.com.au/cp2/c2/webi/image/014940fk.pdf>.
- <sup>35</sup> <http://afl.com.au/cp2/c2/webi/image/014940fk.pdf>.
- <sup>36</sup> <http://afl.com.au/default.asp?pg=community&spg=display&articleid=234842>.
- <sup>37</sup> <http://afl.com.au/default.asp?pg=intleagues&spg=display&articleid=287352>.
- <sup>38</sup> <http://afl.com.au/default.asp?pg=intcup>.
- <sup>39</sup> <http://afl.com.au/default.asp?pg=recfooty>.
- <sup>40</sup> <http://afl.com.au/default.asp?pg=recfooty>.
- <sup>41</sup> <http://afl.com.au/cp2/c2/webi/image/014940fk.pdf>.
- <sup>42</sup> *'Welcome to the AFL'* workbook.
- <sup>43</sup> *The AFL and Indigenous Australia* booklet.
- <sup>44</sup> <http://www.aflauskick.com.au/>.
- <sup>45</sup> *The AFL and Indigenous Australia* booklet.
- <sup>46</sup> <http://afl.com.au/cp2/c2/webi/image/014940fk.pdf>.
- <sup>47</sup> *The AFL and Indigenous Australia* booklet.
- <sup>48</sup> *The AFL and Indigenous Australia* booklet.
- <sup>49</sup> *The AFL and Indigenous Australia* booklet.
- <sup>50</sup> *The AFL and Indigenous Australia* booklet.
- <sup>51</sup> *The AFL and Indigenous Australia* booklet.
- <sup>52</sup> *The AFL and Indigenous Australia* booklet.
- <sup>53</sup> <http://afl.com.au/cp2/c2/webi/article/216930ad.pdf>.
- <sup>54</sup> <http://afl.com.au/cp2/c2/webi/article/216930ad.pdf>.

- <sup>55</sup> <http://afl.com.au/cp2/c2/webi/article/216930ad.pdf>.
- <sup>56</sup> 'AFL to spread the word' by Sam Lienert from AAP, 5 June 2006.
- <sup>57</sup> 'Welcome to the AFL' by George Farrugia in the AFL Record, round 12, 16-24 June 2006.
- <sup>58</sup> <http://afl.com.au/default.asp?pg=community&spg=display&articleid=234891>.
- <sup>59</sup> 'Unity name of the game' by John Masanauskas, 13 April 2006 at <http://afl.com.au/default.asp?pg=community&spg=display&articleid=257759>.
- <sup>60</sup> 'Under-12 coach suspended over racial abuse' in *The Age*, 1 August 2005.
- <sup>61</sup> 'New campaign to curb footy racism' by Liz Minchin in *The Age*, 5 August 2005.
- <sup>62</sup> 'It's time to eliminate racism from all sports', *The Age*, August 4, 2005.
- <sup>63</sup> <http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200504/s1354166.htm>.
- <sup>64</sup> [http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/common/story\\_page/0,5744,15978691%255E1702,00.html](http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/common/story_page/0,5744,15978691%255E1702,00.html).
- <sup>65</sup> 'Education the way to stop sport's racism' in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 Feb 2006 at <http://www.smh.com.au/news/Sport/Education-the-way-to-stop-sports-racism/2006/02/02/1138590589300.html>.
- <sup>66</sup> *Bouncing Racism out of Sport* booklet.
- <sup>67</sup> *Bouncing Racism out of Sport* booklet.
- <sup>68</sup> 'The Glue that Brings us Together: combating racism in sport' speech by Andrew Demetriou at the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Human Rights Oration, 9 December 2005.
- <sup>69</sup> 'The Glue that Brings us Together: combating racism in sport' speech by Andrew Demetriou at the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Human Rights Oration, 9 December 2005.
- <sup>70</sup> <http://afl.com.au/default.asp?pg=aflinfosheets&spg=display&articleid=285684>.
- <sup>71</sup> 'The Glue that Brings us Together: combating racism in sport' speech by Andrew Demetriou at the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Human Rights Oration, 9 December 2005.
- <sup>72</sup> <http://afl.com.au/default.asp?pg=aflinfosheets&spg=display&articleid=285684>.
- <sup>73</sup> <http://afl.com.au/cp2/c2/webi/article/175176aw.pdf>.
- <sup>74</sup> <http://afl.com.au/default.asp?pg=ethicsnrules&spg=display&articleid=175184>.
- <sup>75</sup> [www.aflua.com.au](http://www.aflua.com.au).