



# INDIGENOUS ALL STARS

BEYOND THE GAME

**Strengthening Social Emotional &  
Cultural Wellbeing Through Sport.**

13-15 February 2025 in Perth Western Australia,  
on Whadjuk Noongar country.



# CELEBRATING CULTURE, CONNECTION AND EXCELLENCE

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The return of the Indigenous All Stars in 2025 was a joyous celebration for our game, and a key step along our path to continue to bring outstanding talent into football at the highest level.

This game, and the events surrounding it across several days in the Perth community, was a significant event for the AFL, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and, not just for football, but for the country.

It was an acknowledgment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders being present in this great game of ours.

The players told of their desire to represent and be present, and to make a statement - We are here.

The opportunity for the next generation to witness their heroes live together, on a big stage at Optus Oval, was a massive step forward from previous games that had been played in Darwin and Alice Springs, and we hope provides inspiration and aspiration for the next generation of great stars in our sport.

This document details the work done in the build-up to our First All Stars game in a decade, and tracks the outcomes and achievements for both community and elite impact of bringing this team together again.

I wish to call out the leadership of former AFL commissioner Helen Milroy, and also the work of Tanya Hosch and her team in the success of the All Stars.

Our game is better with the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander talent at all levels, and it is our collective responsibility to provide welcoming environments at every step in our football pathway.

I look forward to the next gathering of our All Stars.

**Andrew Dillon,**  
AFL Chief Executive Officer

# THE SPIRIT OF CONNECTION

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As a descendant of the Palyku people of the Pilbara region of Western Australia, I have carried the responsibility as an AFL Commissioner with a deep sense of pride in our people and our game, and a firm belief in what football can offer when it is truly inclusive.

One of the most important lessons I have seen reinforced time and again is the central role of Social and Emotional Wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in football. Our connection to Culture, Country, family, and community is not separate from the game — it is the foundation of who we are and how we thrive. When these connections are recognised and respected, our players are stronger, our communities are healthier, and our game is richer for it.

Together we have made progress in embedding cultural safety, building pathways, and ensuring Indigenous voices are heard at the highest levels of decision-making. Yet the work is not finished. We must continue to address racism and discrimination, strengthen opportunities across all levels of the game, and keep Social and Emotional Wellbeing at the heart of every decision.

Football has the power to unite, to heal, and to inspire.

**Professor Helen Milroy,**

Former AFL Commissioner and Former Co-Chair of the AFL National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council



# HONOURING CULTURE, IDENTITY & WELLBEING

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As the Social and Emotional Wellbeing Practice Lead and Head of Indigenous and Social Policy, we are proud to present this report on the AFL Indigenous All Stars event, held from 13 to 15 February 2025 on Whadjuk Noongar Country in Perth, Western Australia.

This event was a celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture, identity, and resilience, bringing together Indigenous AFL and AFLW players in a unique space for connection, mentorship, and community engagement. Across three days, players and stakeholders honoured their shared history while inspiring future generations through sport, leadership, and storytelling.

At the heart of this event is Social, Emotional, and Cultural Wellbeing. This holistic approach recognises that wellbeing extends beyond the physical it is about being grounded in Culture, proud in identity and connected to community. From a mental health perspective, these foundations act as protective factors, supporting players to meet challenges such as racism and discrimination with resilience and confidence.

Belonging, respect, and cultural grounding nurture pride and holistic health, mental, emotional, and spiritual, sustaining players both on and off the field. Keeping Culture central is what underpins Indigenous excellence and ensures it continues to flourish in sport and community life.

We acknowledge the dedication of countless Indigenous leaders, both recognised and unsung, whose courage and vision created pathways for our people within this game. Their contributions laid the foundations for events such as this, ensuring opportunities for players, families, and professionals alike.

More than a game, the Indigenous All Stars is a celebration of identity, belonging, and collective strength. It uplifts communities, honours Culture, and champions Indigenous excellence.

We look forward to continuing this important work with players, communities, and partners, ensuring that Culture and wellbeing remain at the centre of all we do.

Always was always will be.

**Nioka Tyson,**  
Social & Emotional Wellbeing Practice Lead, AFL

**Jade Adams,**  
Head of Indigenous and Social Policy, AFL

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

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**The AFL acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work and play our game. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge we play our great game on this land and respect the cultures of all First Peoples, their contribution to our nation and contribution to the game of Australian Rules Football.**

The AFL's Social Emotional and Cultural Wellbeing Framework acknowledges the impacts of colonisation on the social and emotional wellbeing of First Nations Peoples and is committed to providing culturally responsive wellbeing services for all First Nations players and staff.

In this document, we recognise both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as the First Nations of Australia. We acknowledge and pay respect to the knowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are unique, all with their own languages, knowledge systems, beliefs, and histories.

We recognise the collective terms they prefer also vary. With respectful consideration to these preferences, typically we will specify Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples when referring to First Nations Peoples in this report. From time to time, we use the term Indigenous. However, we note that for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, this is not preferred. As such, we have only used this where we are referencing its use from another source, or it is the established use of the term, such as its use in "Indigenous Player Development Managers (IPDM's)". Where referring to individual Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, we have endeavoured to incorporate their preferences, including for example, reference to the Country to which they are connected.





## CONNECTION - CULTURE - LEGACY - STRENGTH

# CONTRIBUTORS AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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This report was developed to capture the experiences, cultural significance, and extensive work surrounding the 2025 Indigenous All Stars event. It reflects the cultural, community, and sporting impact of this important celebration.

While produced independently from the formal organisation of the event, the report draws on insights and perspectives gathered throughout to offer a meaningful reflection on its outcomes and significance.

We thank Nikki McKenzie, who collaborated with the AFL's Social and Emotional Wellbeing team to compile this report. Her work in bringing together diverse voices and cultural perspectives was central to shaping this report.

We acknowledge Paul Vanderberg and Amy Blake, and their leadership of the AFL Indigenous All Stars Organising Committee in guiding the development and delivery of the event. We also acknowledge the contributions of the broader AFL Indigenous All Stars Organising Committee, as well as the many individuals—players, staff, cultural advisors, and community members—who worked tirelessly to deliver the event, generously sharing their knowledge, time, and energy throughout.

Importantly, the event offered a moment of reflection and learning for the AFL and its partners about what it means to deliver a culturally safe, inclusive, and empowering experience for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander players, staff, and communities.

The Indigenous All Stars game stands as a powerful celebration of culture, connection, and legacy—shaped by the experience, dedication, and vision of all involved.

We would like to sincerely thank and acknowledge the following individuals for their important contributions to the development of this report:

- **Nikki McKenzie**  
Nyikina, Jabirr Jabirr, Yawuru, and Djukun;  
Social Emotional Wellbeing content contributor.
- **Nioka Tyson**  
Yuwalaraay and Gamilaraay;  
Social and Emotional Wellbeing Practice Lead AFL, Social Emotional Wellbeing content contributor.
- **Jade Adams**  
Wuthathi and Yadhigana;  
Head of Indigenous and Social Policy, AFL
- **Angela Burt**  
Palawa; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Specialist, AFL
- **Dr Kate Hall**  
Non-Indigenous; Head of Mental Health and Wellbeing, AFL
- **Patrick Keane**  
Non-Indigenous; Office of the CEO, AFL
- **Mark Leavy**  
Kooma; National Indigenous Participation Lead, AFL
- **Paul Vandenberg**  
Wirangu and Kokatha; Indigenous and Multicultural Player Engagement Manager, AFL
- **Sean Gorman**  
Non-Indigenous; Former Senior Policy Manager, AFL
- **AFL Indigenous All Stars Organising Committee**



## CONNECTION - CULTURE - LEGACY - STRENGTH

# A SHOWCASE OF EXCEPTIONAL TALENT & CULTURAL STRENGTH

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The AFL Indigenous All Stars experience was held over 13-15 February 2025 in Perth Western Australia, on Whadjuk Noongar country. The All Stars game had not been played for 10 years and provided an opportunity for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander players listed on both AFL and AFLW teams to attend and participate in three days of activities that fostered bonding, cultural pride, and community connection. The three days of events and programs culminated in the reinstatement of the All Stars game, where the AFL's premier Indigenous players united to form the Indigenous All Stars team, a representative team comprising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander players from across the league. This team showcased the exceptional talent and cultural heritage of Indigenous players in Australian rules football. The cultural activities surrounding the game highlighted the strength of identity, belonging, and resilience within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The players engaged in activities that strengthened cultural esteem, provided mentorship opportunities, and celebrated achievements in the sporting arena. This report, instigated and overseen by the AFL's Social and Emotional Wellbeing team and using Indigenous cultural and social methodology, reflects on the event from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective of promoting Social and Emotional Wellbeing through the experiences at the All Stars.

The Indigenous All Stars Game holds deep cultural and historical significance, first emerging as a platform to celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander excellence in football while fostering pride, identity, and unity.

More than just a match, it reflects the long-standing contributions of Indigenous players to the game and creates space for cultural expression, healing, and collective strength.

The return of the All Stars in 2025 came at a pivotal time, amplifying the voices of players who have long called for its reinstatement—not just as a showcase of elite talent, but as a symbol of the AFL's responsibility to uphold its commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It strengthened identity and belonging, provided young people with visible role models and reaffirmed the cultural responsibilities carried by Indigenous athletes. The event honoured Culture, connection, and community, while continuing to push for structural change across the AFL landscape.

The All Stars played against Fremantle Football Club. Fremantle's deep and sustained commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander players, culture, and community made it a natural and culturally significant choice to host the Indigenous All Stars event. The Club's consistent recognition of Walyalup, its enduring representation of Indigenous players across both AFL and AFLW, and its broader connection with communities across Western Australia reflect values aligned with the intent and spirit of the event. Hosting the match against Fremantle in Perth not only honoured the region's strong Noongar heritage but also reinforced the Club's ongoing role in advancing Indigenous representation and cultural pride in Australian football.

CONNECTION - CULTURE - LEGACY - STRENGTH

# 2025 INDIGENOUS ALL STARS COACHING PANEL



**XAVIER CLARKE**  
HEAD COACH  
LARRAKIA, AMRREAMO, AND  
MARRITJAVIN; NORTH MELBOURNE



**JASON WILLIAMS**  
ASSISTANT COACH  
WILMAN NOONGAR;  
PORT ADELAIDE



**ROGER HAYDEN**  
ASSISTANT COACH  
BALLARDONG - GORENG NOONGAR;  
FREMANTLE



**JARROD LIENERT**  
ASSISTANT COACH  
NGARRINDJERI; NORTH MELBOURNE



**CHANCE BATEMAN**  
ASSISTANT COACH  
BALLARDONG NOONGAR;  
WEST COAST EAGLES



# 2025 INDIGENOUS ALL STARS SQUAD



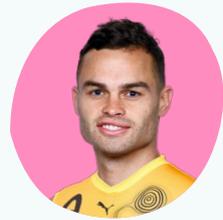
**XAVIER CLARKE (COACH)**  
NORTH MELBOURNE  
LARRAKIA AND  
AMRREAMO/MARRITJAVIN



**MICHAEL WALTERS (CAP)**  
FREMANTLE  
WHADJUK, WILMEN  
AND NGARRINDJERI



**CALLUM AH CHEE**  
BRISBANE LIONS  
NOONGAR, PALYKU  
AND NYIKINA, YAWURU



**KARL AMON**  
HAWTHORN  
NOONUCCAL



**SHAI BOLTON**  
FREMANTLE  
MINANG AND WILMAN



**JASE BURGOYNE**  
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KOKATHA, LARRAKIA, WARAI



**CHARLIE CAMERON**  
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**JEREMY FINLAYSON**  
PORT ADELAIDE  
YORTA YORTA



**JADE GRESHAM**  
ESSENDON  
YORTA YORTA



**JOEL HAMLING**  
SYDNEY SWANS  
YORTA YORTA



**BOBBY HILL**  
COLLINGWOOD  
WHADJUK, BALLARDONG,  
NOONGAR



**BRADLEY HILL**  
ST KILDA  
WILMEN, NOONGAR



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PORT ADELAIDE  
WARDAMANA



**LAWSON HUMPHRIES**  
GEELONG CATS  
NYUL NYUL, OOMIDAY, WORRORA



**JARMAN IMPEY**  
HAWTHORN  
YORTA YORTA



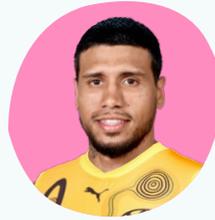
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COLLINGWOOD  
JARU, KIJA



**LIAM JONES**  
WESTERN BULLDOGS  
KIJA



**TIM KELLY**  
WEST COAST EAGLES  
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YAMATJI



**COEN LIVINGSTONE**  
WEST COAST EAGLES  
BALARDONG, NOONGAR



**BEN LONG**  
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ANMATJERRE



**STEVEN MAY**  
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**JESSE MOTLOP**  
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**MAURICE RIOLI JNR**  
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TIWI



**WILLIE RIOLI**  
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TIWI



**LIAM RYAN**  
WEST COAST EAGLES  
YAMATJI



**JY SIMPKIN**  
NORTH MELBOURNE  
YORTA YORTA



**TYSON STENGLE**  
GEELONG CATS  
WIRANGU



**NASIAH  
WANGANEEN-MILERA**  
ST KILDA  
KOKATHA, NARANGGA



**ZAC WILLIAMS**  
CARLTON  
WIRADJURI

# CONNECTION - CULTURE - LEGACY - STRENGTH

## 2025 INDIGENOUS ALL STARS SELECTION COMMITTEE

The selection of the Indigenous All Stars team was led by Michael O'Loughlin, Chairman of Selectors. O'Loughlin is a proud Kurna, Ngarrindjeri, and Narungga man, Australian Football Hall of Famer, and two-time All Australian. In 2005, he was also named at full-forward in the AFL's Indigenous Team of the Century.



**Xavier Clarke, Jesse Motlop, and Michael O'Loughlin at the Indigenous All Stars jersey presentation**

Photographer: Michael Wilson

### The selection committee also included:

- **Xavier Clarke**  
Larrakia, Amrreamo, and Marritjavin; North Melbourne Assistant Coach; Indigenous All Stars Head Coach
- **Tanya Hosch**  
Torres Strait Islands; Former Executive General Manager, Inclusion and Social Policy, AFL
- **Laura Kane**  
Non-Indigenous; Executive General Manager, Football, AFL
- **Josh Mahoney**  
Non-Indigenous; Former General Manager, Football Operations, AFL
- **Chad Wingard**  
Ngarrindjeri; Indigenous and Social Policy Officer, AFL
- **Paul Vandenberg**  
Wirangu and Kokatha; Indigenous and Multicultural Player Engagement Manager, AFL

### **AFL Representation**

A 29-player squad was selected for the Indigenous All Stars, with a further 11 Indigenous AFL players attending the Indigenous All Stars Gathering as part of the non-playing cohort. This meant that 40 out of 61 Indigenous AFL players (approximately 66 per cent) were involved in the event, either as players or in a supporting capacity. Representation spanned all 18 AFL clubs, with players from 17 clubs contributing to the playing group. All 18 clubs were represented through administrative and community engagement roles, reinforcing the event's significance and the AFL's continued commitment to Indigenous growth and engagement across the game.

### **AFLW Representation**

Additionally, 13 of the 19 Indigenous AFLW players (approximately 68 per cent) attended the Indigenous All Stars Gathering in a supporting role, taking part in the broader Indigenous All Stars program. This was an historic moment, marking the first time an Indigenous AFLW contingent has been included in the Indigenous All Stars program for the Australian Football League.

### **AFLW Players in Attendance**

#### **Adelaide Crows**

- **Danielle Ponter** – Marranunggu, Anmatjerre & Tiwi

#### **Brisbane Lions**

- **Ally Anderson** – Gangulu
- **Courtney Hodder** – Yamatji & Noongar
- **Dakota Davidson** – Gunditjmara

#### **Collingwood**

- **Kalinda Howarth** – Yuin
- **Mattea Breed** – Tiwi

#### **GWS Giants**

- **Aliesha Newman** – Ningy Ningy

#### **Gold Coast Suns**

- **Heidi Talbot** – Ait Koedal

#### **Hawthorn**

- **Kaitlyn Ashmore** – Dja Dja Wurrung

#### **Port Adelaide**

- **Gemma Houghton** – Yindjibarndi
- **Jasmin Stewart** – Jaru

#### **Sydney Swans**

- **Zipporah Fish** – Noongar, Wirangu, Larrakia & Wongi

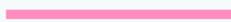
#### **Fremantle**

- **Gabrielle Biedenweg-Webster** – Wiradjuri



CONNECTION - CULTURE - LEGACY - STRENGTH

# INDIGENOUS PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT IN THE ALL STARS GAME



The Indigenous All Stars presented a unique opportunity to prioritise the engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander football and administration team members.

An expression of interest was sought from administrative and football team members across all 18 Clubs. Approximately 200 people expressed interest in being part of the event. There was a high-level of interest from Club team members who identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (15 per cent of the total number of applicants). The decision was made to prioritise the engagement of these team members, because it would be advantageous to the core purpose of the event. In total, 45 Club staff were engaged as IAS team members, with 31 identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (69 per cent). The reason that this percentage was not higher, was because there were some essential roles where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander team members were under-represented – digital media, strength and conditioning, and physiotherapy.

The insights into the skillset of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander team members working within the AFL industry was an unexpected bonus of the IAS experience. This data will be useful in building the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 'off-field' talent.

The Indigenous All Stars game, as an event, provided early -year cut through for the wider game in a way far beyond any other similar pre-season events, such as community camps, pre-season matches in non-traditional areas away from major AFL venues, or significant AFL media conferences / announcements. The outstanding crowd of 37,865, from 43,482 tickets issued, was beyond the average attendance for matches in the 2024 home and away season while its television audience, via Fox Footy, reached more than 240,000 viewers, nearly 100,000 more than recent pre-season community games.

Interest in the game across the AFL social media ecosystem numbered nearly 400k users at a time of the year when the AFL is traditionally seeking to try and build interest in the coming season. The quality of the football, and those players involved, was able to engage our fan base in a way well beyond usual pre-season encounters when players are readjusting to the coming year. Editorial content for the match itself saw more than 600,000 views of material written for the game and this then flowed into season preparations for our clubs.





CONNECTION - CULTURE - LEGACY - STRENGTH

# HONOURING MOMENTS & MILESTONES

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The Indigenous All Stars has a rich legacy, and their return comes at a crucial time. Following the success of the 2022 Indigenous and Multicultural Player Summit, where players from diverse backgrounds came together, there was overwhelming support for its return. The players were clear: they want the All Stars match back, not just as a celebration of talent, but as a symbol of the AFL's ongoing commitment to Indigenous communities and players.

It has been 10 years since the last Indigenous All Stars game...

- **80 years** since the historic 1944 game, where an all-Aboriginal team, made up of players stationed at the Loveday Internment Camp during World War II, played against a combined SANFL team at Adelaide Oval. This match, a fundraiser for the Australian Comforts Fund to support soldiers during the war, is considered one of the earliest high-profile games featuring an all-Aboriginal team and a precursor to Indigenous representation in Australian Rules Football.
- **51 years** since a team of the best Indigenous Australians from across the country toured Papua New Guinea to play against the Papua New Guinea team, showcasing Indigenous talent on the international stage.
- **41 years** since the Indigenous All Stars team played against a combined Richmond FC-Sunraysia Football Association team in Mildura in October 1983, securing a resounding victory by 138 points and marking a pivotal moment in Indigenous football history.
- **32 years** since Nicky Winmar's iconic moment in 1993, when he lifted his guernsey and pointed to his skin, declaring, "I'm black and I'm proud to be black," an act that remains a powerful symbol in the fight against racism.
- **31 years** since the Indigenous All Stars team played against Collingwood FC

- **31 years** since the Indigenous All Stars team played against Collingwood FC in a sold-out game in Darwin in 1994, in response to uneducated racist comments made by the Collingwood President at the time.
- **30 years** since the introduction of the AFL's Rule 35, known as the Peek Rule, which addresses racial and religious vilification. This landmark rule was introduced after Essendon player Michael Long OAM formally complained to the AFL following racial abuse during a game against Collingwood, leading to significant changes in how the League addresses racism.
- **20 years** since the Indigenous Team of the Century was named in 2005, recognising the incredible contribution of Indigenous players to Australian football.
- **20 years** since the AFL's Indigenous Round began in 2005, featuring the celebrated annual Dreamtime match between Essendon Football Club and Richmond Football Club.
- **10 years** since Adam Goodes performed his now-iconic war cry celebration during the Swans' Indigenous Round game against Carlton in 2015.
- **10 years** since the renaming of the AFL's Indigenous Round to Sir Doug Nicholls Round, honouring the contributions of Pastor Sir Doug Nicholls KCVO OBE, a celebrated Indigenous leader and former player.



**Indigenous All Stars and support staff pose during the 2025 Toyota AFL Indigenous All Stars match between the Indigenous All Stars and the Fremantle Dockers at Optus Stadium on February 15, 2025 in Perth, Australia**

Photographer: Michael Willson

## CULTURAL PRIDE & IDENTITY

The event strongly emphasised cultural pride and identity. The gathering of Indigenous players, community members, and supporters reinforced a shared history and the importance of maintaining cultural traditions and connection. The pride expressed during the event was a way to challenge mainstream narratives and assert the strength of Indigenous identity. The outpouring of emotions during key moments demonstrated how cultural pride is deeply tied to personal and collective success. Events like these provide a rare but essential space where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can celebrate their identity openly and unapologetically. Many players echoed the sentiment that events like this are a platform for reconciliation, helping to bring Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities together through sport.

## COMMUNITY & CONNECTION

A central theme throughout the event was the significance of community and connection, integral to social and emotional wellbeing. From the players' first contact with each other to the game itself, the event fostered strong interpersonal bonds. Many of the players shared their experiences of overcoming homesickness with the support of their clubs, highlighting how relationships play a key role in emotional wellbeing. The moment when a new recruit's family arrived to celebrate his signing was a powerful illustration of the collective nature of success in Indigenous culture. Additionally, the overwhelming turnout of more than 40,000 attendees further underscored the strength of the community, showing that when given the opportunity, mob will always show up to support mob. This unity extended beyond Indigenous players and fans, as non-Indigenous attendees also showed immense respect and support, reinforcing the broader message of reconciliation.

Throughout the three days, all players visited the schools detailed below as well as Clontarf Academy, The Stars Foundation and Noongar Radio, engaging with students and community members. A cohort of 40 Indigenous AFL players and 13 Indigenous AFLW players were engaged to deliver the Indigenous All Stars community visits. These visits reinforced the importance of role models in fostering aspiration and connection for younger generations. Players shared their journeys, discussing their pathways into professional football and the challenges they faced along the way. During one of the community visits, a community member also asked some of the players to reflect on the number on their guernsey and to identify the Indigenous players who wore that number before them. As each player reflected back, it was clear to see the pride on their face as they instantly recalled the names of past players and the honour they felt to represent the same number. These interactions were instrumental in strengthening ties between the AFL and local Indigenous communities, demonstrating the broader impact that sport can have beyond the field.

VISIT	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Millen Primary School	60
Bassendean Primary School	45
Tuart Hill Primary School	75
Subiaco Primary School	150
Guildford Primary School	90
St Pius X Catholic Primary School	60
Mt Hawthorn Primary School	200
Lathlain Primary School	80
Brentwood Primary School	400
<b>Total</b>	<b>1080</b>

Other key elements of the community and connection initiatives:

## OPEN TRAINING SESSION

This event provided a fan engagement opportunity for the Indigenous community to attend and view the Indigenous All Stars training session. This included a fan meet and greet, signings and photo opportunities with the players. Prior to the training session taking place, our future stars of the AFL were engaged in an immersive experience with the Indigenous All Stars. The Next Generation Academy players from the West Coast Eagles and the Fremantle Dockers joined the players during the final rehearsal of the war cry practise. Post the practise the players were able to address the NGA boys (aged 15) and share their experiences on transitioning into the AFL as a professional player. Over 1,000 people attended the open training session again strengthening ties between the AFL and local Indigenous communities with some attending from the Kimberley's and the Northern Territory.

## MENTORSHIP & GENERATIONAL SUPPORT

The role of mentorship was evident, with older players and leaders guiding the younger generation. The discussion of younger players coming transitioning in and older ones transitioning out highlighted the importance of knowledge and experience. The event demonstrated that Indigenous athletes are not just sports figures but also cultural ambassadors who pave the way for future generations. This type of mentorship ensures that knowledge, resilience, and values are carried forward, reinforcing the intergenerational strength of Indigenous communities. Many players reflected on the privilege of being able to represent their people on such a national stage, helping to shift narratives and inspire younger generations.

## RESILIENCE & OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

Many players shared their struggles, particularly around homesickness and adjusting to life away from family. Many echoed the initial difficulties but credited their support networks, particularly their families and 'footy' families, for helping them navigate these challenges. The event itself also reflected resilience, occurring at a time when many Indigenous people were disheartened by political decisions, such as the rejection of the Voice referendum. As AFL's EGM for Inclusion and Social Policy, Tanya Hosch highlighted the event became a space for healing and rebuilding cultural esteem, showing that despite setbacks, the community continues to find strength in unity and shared experiences. The players also highlighted how sport has given them a sense of purpose, belonging, and an avenue to give back to their communities.

## REPRESENTATION & EQUITY IN SPORT

The event also highlighted ongoing conversations about representation and equity in sport. The presence of AFLW players who expressed their desire for equal opportunities showed that while progress has been made, there is still work to be done. Their excitement to be part of the event was paired with a clear message: Indigenous women in sport deserve the same level of recognition and celebration. Additionally, Uncle Richard Walley's statement about the sporting field being a level playing field reinforced the idea that sport has the power to break down barriers, create opportunities, and provide a sense of belonging for Indigenous athletes. Players from both teams acknowledged that being able to compete in this game, broadcasted nationally, demonstrated the growing recognition of Indigenous talent and the importance of visibility in professional sport.



# CONNECTION - CULTURE - LEGACY - STRENGTH

# INDIGENOUS ALL STARS: GATHERING IN STRENGTH

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## AFL National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council

The AFL National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Council held its first meeting of 2025 during the Indigenous All Stars Program in the lead-up to the February All Stars Game. The Advisory Council provides strategic advice to the AFL CEO and Commission on the implementation of the AFL's Indigenous strategy and policies, supporting the industry's role in driving social and cultural change across Australia. Its membership is detailed below:

## ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS

### Co-Chairs

- **Paul Briggs AO** – Yorta Yorta elder
- **Professor Helen Milroy** – Palyku; Former AFL Commissioner (2019–2025)

### Members

- **Gabrielle Trainor AO** – Non-Indigenous; Non-Executive Director and Chair of the Construction Industry Culture Taskforce
- **Xavier Clarke** – Larrakia, Amreamo, and Marritjavin; North Melbourne Assistant Coach; Indigenous All Stars Head Coach
- **Tanya Hosch** – Torres Strait Islands; Former Executive General Manager, Inclusion and Social Policy, AFL
- **Paul Vandenberg** – Wirangu and Kokatha; Indigenous and Multicultural Player Engagement Manager, AFL
- **Patricia Turner AM** – Arrente and Gurdanji; CEO, National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO)

- **Joe Morrison** – Dagoman and Torres Strait Islands - Group CEO, Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation (ILSC)
- **Alicia Janz** – Meriam Mir; Ex-player, AFLW; Career Pathways Manager, Waalitj Foundation
- **Shane Edwards** – Arrernte; Ex-player, AFL; Indigenous Player Development Manager and Recruiting Officer, Adelaide Crows

### Secretariat

- **Jade Adams** – Wuthathi and Yadhiagana; Head of Indigenous and Social Policy, AFL
- **Chad Wingard** – Ngarrindjeri; Indigenous and Social Policy Officer, AFL

## AFL INDIGENOUS CLUB BOARD DIRECTORS

In a significant moment for the AFL, nine clubs across the league currently have Indigenous representation at the board level — the highest number in the game’s history. These representatives came together for the first time during the 2025 Indigenous All Stars Program, marking a milestone in collective leadership and cultural influence across the industry.

### CLUB REPRESENTATION

#### Brisbane Lions

- **Dean Gibson** – Guugu Yimithirr
- **Chris Johnson** – Gunditjmara and Wiradjuri

#### Collingwood

- **Jodie Sizer** – Djab Wurrung, Gunditjmara

#### Fremantle

- **Colleen Hayward** – Noongar

#### Richmond

- **Andrew Peters** – Yarra Yarra, Yorta Yorta, Ngurai willum and Taungerong

#### Sydney Swans

- **Michael O’Loughlin** – Kaurna, Ngarrindjeri, Narungga

#### Tasmanian FC

- **Graeme Gardner** – Palawa

#### West Coast Eagles

- **Ben Wyatt** – Yamatji

#### Western Bulldogs

- **Belinda Duarte** – Wotjobaluk and Dja Dja Wurrung



(L-R) Maurice Rioli, Liam Ryan, and Charlie Cameron line up during the 2025 Toyota AFL Indigenous All Stars match

Photographer: Michael Willson

## **AFL INDIGENOUS PLAYER DEVELOPMENT MANAGER 2025 - COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE**

The 2025 AFL Indigenous Player Development Manager (IPDM) Community of Practice (CoP) was held during the Indigenous All Stars event, where key priority areas for the year were confirmed and presented to all 18 Club General Managers of Football Operations. Established to honour Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and amplify Indigenous voices, the CoP provides a trusted space for shared learning and cultural leadership through yarning circles and Indigenous-led discussions.

## **2025 INDIGENOUS ALL STARS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENTS**

Leading up to the 2025 Indigenous All Stars Game, more than 1,250 people participated in a series of unique community activities and events. These engagements provided opportunities for local communities to connect with the players, learn about the significance of the event, and celebrate Indigenous culture. The diversity of the engagements, from school visits to community organisation activations, ensured broad participation and fostered a sense of inclusion and pride within the community, contributing to the overall success of the Indigenous All Stars program.

### **44 NGA Participants**

44 Next Generation Academy (NGA) participants attended open training and the curtain-raiser event.

### **AFL Footy Focus Initiative**

AFL Photos, in partnership with Canon Australia and Blak Lens, welcomed 20 emerging photographers for a special initiative designed to nurture the next generation of sports photographers in Western Australia.

### **Indigenous All Stars Player Visits**

Player visits provided an opportunity for AFL and AFLW players to connect with the Indigenous community in Perth. Activities included school and community visits, offering Q&A sessions with the Indigenous All Stars players, embodying critical cultural practices such as yarning, sharing knowledge, and storytelling.

### **AFLNT Leadership Program**

Nine emerging Indigenous leaders (aged 18-30) from Central Australia, identified for their leadership potential, engaged in a pilot program in Perth. This included interactions with coaches, administrators, and wellbeing leaders, designed to enhance leadership, cultural connection, and contributions to the NT football system, ahead of the 2025 rollout.

### **Indigenous All Stars Community Market**

The market featured 12 Indigenous stalls at Perth Stadium, creating a vibrant platform for showcasing Indigenous businesses and celebrating Indigenous entrepreneurship.

### **All Stars Legacy Partner**

The AFL was proud to have the Polly Farmer Foundation as the official All Stars Legacy partner for the Indigenous All Stars vs Fremantle match. The Polly Farmer Foundation's academic enrichment programs empower Aboriginal students to complete school and transition into successful post-school pathways, including university, direct employment, apprenticeships, traineeships, and technical training. A portion of All Stars merchandise sales was donated to the Polly Farmer Foundation.

### **Community Ticketing**

The Waalitj Foundation were proud sponsors of the community ticketing program for the Indigenous All Stars match. The Waalitj Foundation empowers First Nations people through education, employment, and business. Through their support, 2,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members were able to attend the game free of charge.

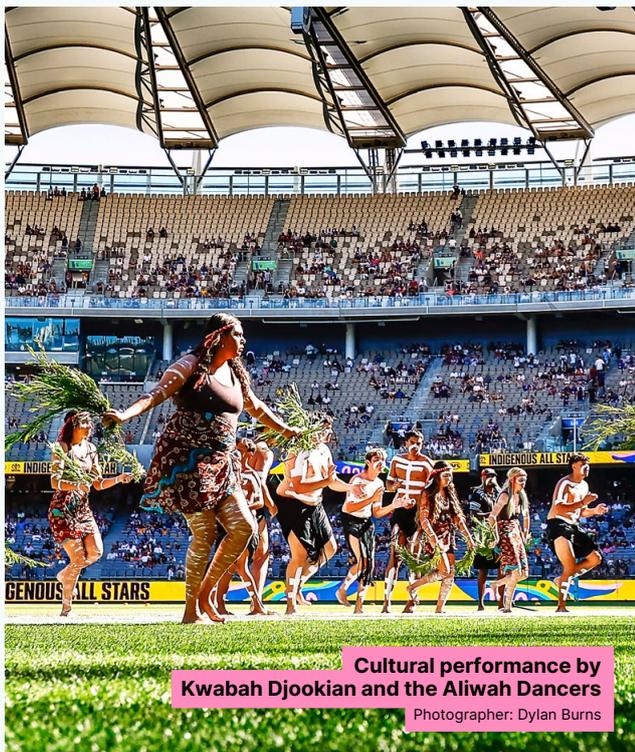
## CEREMONIES ON GAME DAY

Ahead of the match, a Welcome to Country was conducted by Dr Richard Walley OAM, Noongar Elder who also has strong ties to the Fremantle Football Club.

A pre-game cultural performance was performed by dance groups Kwabah Djookian (kwaa-baah djook-ian) and Aliwah Dancers (Ul-ee-wah).

A gift exchange was conducted prior to the match, with the captains from the Indigenous All Stars and Fremantle teams. Fremantle presented the All Stars a pair of boomerangs from Yawuru/Karrajarrri artist Sam Edgar and the All Stars presented Fremantle with a painting titled 'Indiya' ("star", in Nhandu language) from Nhandu-Wajarri artist Ree Couzens.

In place of the regular coin toss, a bespoke shield called a Mirrar was used which was specially provided for the occasion by Fremantle Football Club. This was conducted by Stephen Michael, the 2025 Sir Doug Nicholls Round Honouree.



Cultural performance by Kwabah Djookian and the Aliwah Dancers

Photographer: Dylan Burns

## HONOURING MICHAEL McLEAN'S LEGACY

Michael McLean, a proud Wuthathi man, inaugural captain of the AFL Indigenous All Stars, and three-time coach of the team, had the honour of presenting the Shield to the 2025 champions.

As a member of the Indigenous Team of the Century, his legacy and invaluable contributions to the game made him the ideal figure to be involved in this historic initiative.

A key part of the initiative was the recognition of Michael McLean, a pivotal figure in Indigenous Australian Rules Football history. His contributions to the game are widely respected, and his legacy includes:

- First-ever Indigenous All Stars captain (1994)
- Three-time coach of the Indigenous All Stars (2003, 2005 and 2007)
- Member of the Indigenous Team of the Century
- Inducted into the AFL Northern Territory Hall of Fame and AFL Northern Territory Team of the Century

Michael McLean's leadership, influence, and lasting impact on the Indigenous All Stars and the AFL made him the perfect figure to unveil and present the Shield for this monumental event.



Mick McLean and All Stars captain Michael Walters pose with the All Stars shield

Photographer: Michael Willson

## POLLY FARMER MEDAL

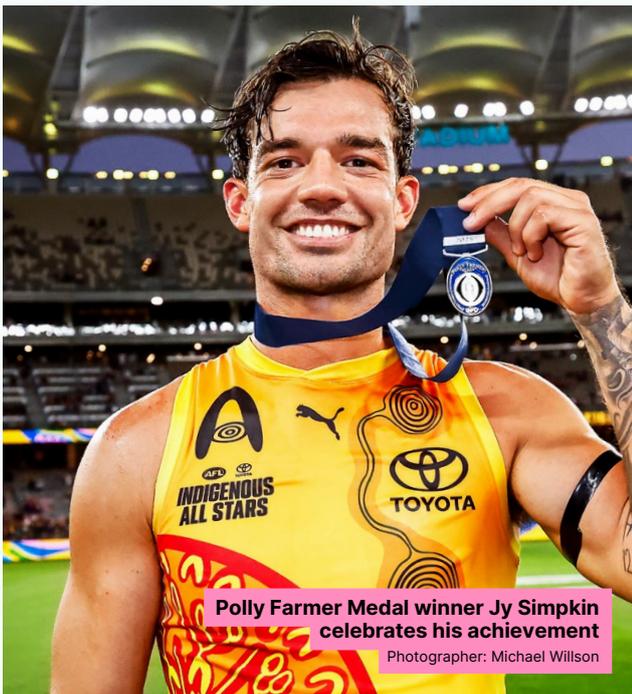
Graham Vivian “Polly” Farmer MBE was an Australian Rules footballer, proud Noongar man, who played for the East Perth Football Club and West Perth Football Club in the WANFL, and the Geelong Football Club in the VFL.

Born in WA and of Indigenous heritage through his Noongar mother, Farmer is considered one of the greatest footballers in the game’s history; when the Australian Football Hall of Fame was established in 1996, Farmer was among the 12 inaugural players given “Legend” status.

He is primarily recognised for the way he revolutionised ruckwork and handballing.

It was fitting that since the inception of the AFL Indigenous All Stars game, the All Stars player judged best on ground has received the Polly Farmer Medal.

In 2025, the Medal was presented by Kim Farmer, Polly Farmer’s daughter, to Jy Simpkin. He was awarded the medal for his outstanding performance. Simpkin’s performance included 30 disposals and a goal, and he was recognized as the best on ground.



**Polly Farmer Medal winner Jy Simpkin celebrates his achievement**

Photographer: Michael Willson

## THE INDIGENOUS ALL STARS SHIELD

Patrick Ikaringanyi Ferguson, a proud Pitjantjatjara and Adnyamathanha man, was born in Broken Hill, New South Wales, and now calls Adelaide home.

The Indigenous All Stars Shield was designed by Indigenous craftsman, Patrick Ferguson, as a tribute to the rich history, cultural strength, and resilience of Indigenous players in the AFL.

Patrick’s vision was to create a physical representation of the Indigenous All Stars’ journey, embedding elements that acknowledge past, present, and future generations.

The Shield will be an official AFL-recognised perpetual trophy, prominently displaying all past Indigenous All Stars results, which will be affixed following the 2025 event.

The Shield will be displayed at AFL House or the winning Club for the next 12 months.

Michael McLean, as the first captain of the AFL Indigenous All Stars and two-time coach of the team, presented the Shield to the 2025 winning team.

## THE INDIGENOUS ALL STARS GUERNSEY

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The guernsey has been designed by Whadjuk, Ballardong Nyoongar, and Eastern Arrernte artist Jade Dolman, who also designed the special Sherrin and the game logo. Dolman's design focused on telling the story of the legacy created by the Indigenous All Stars players who wore the guernsey, with colours from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags represented throughout the artwork. The legacy artwork on the guernsey rises from behind the river and centres around children, with AFL players surrounding them. The design also showcased root symbols representing the pathways for growth and opportunity. Dolman's design includes symbols representing the important role females play, as well as river and freshwater symbols, and the Beeliar/umbilical cord to further represent the importance of water and protecting our future and new life.

## FREMANTLE GUERNSEY

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Fremantle FC wore a guernsey with artwork created by 2007 Indigenous All Stars player and Fremantle great, Roger Hayden, and his uncle Dr. Richard Walley. The guernsey design was the club's inaugural Indigenous Round jumper in 2013. Hayden, who is currently Fremantle's male Next Generation Academy and Game Development Coach, and Walley's work showcased a design that represents the ocean (Wardan) and river (Derbal Yerragan) movements that surround Fremantle (Walyalup), and their importance to Noongar people, as well as the three boomerangs (Karli), symbolising strength, combativeness, and creativity through dance and music.

## INDIGENOUS ALL STARS TEAM LOGO

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The All Stars logo was also designed by Jade Dolman. The All Stars 'A' featured the boomerang and football. The artwork in the boomerang represented connection to country, while the artwork in the football represented past, present, and future.

## EVENT VISUAL ARTWORK

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The artwork represented the Derbal Yerrigan (Swan River), with journey lines following the seasonal movements of Noongar people. On the side were some of the small hills along the river. The river represented how water is central to the cultural, social, and spiritual identity of First Nations people, as well as to their livelihoods and in protecting their connection to the land.

## SHERRIN DESIGN

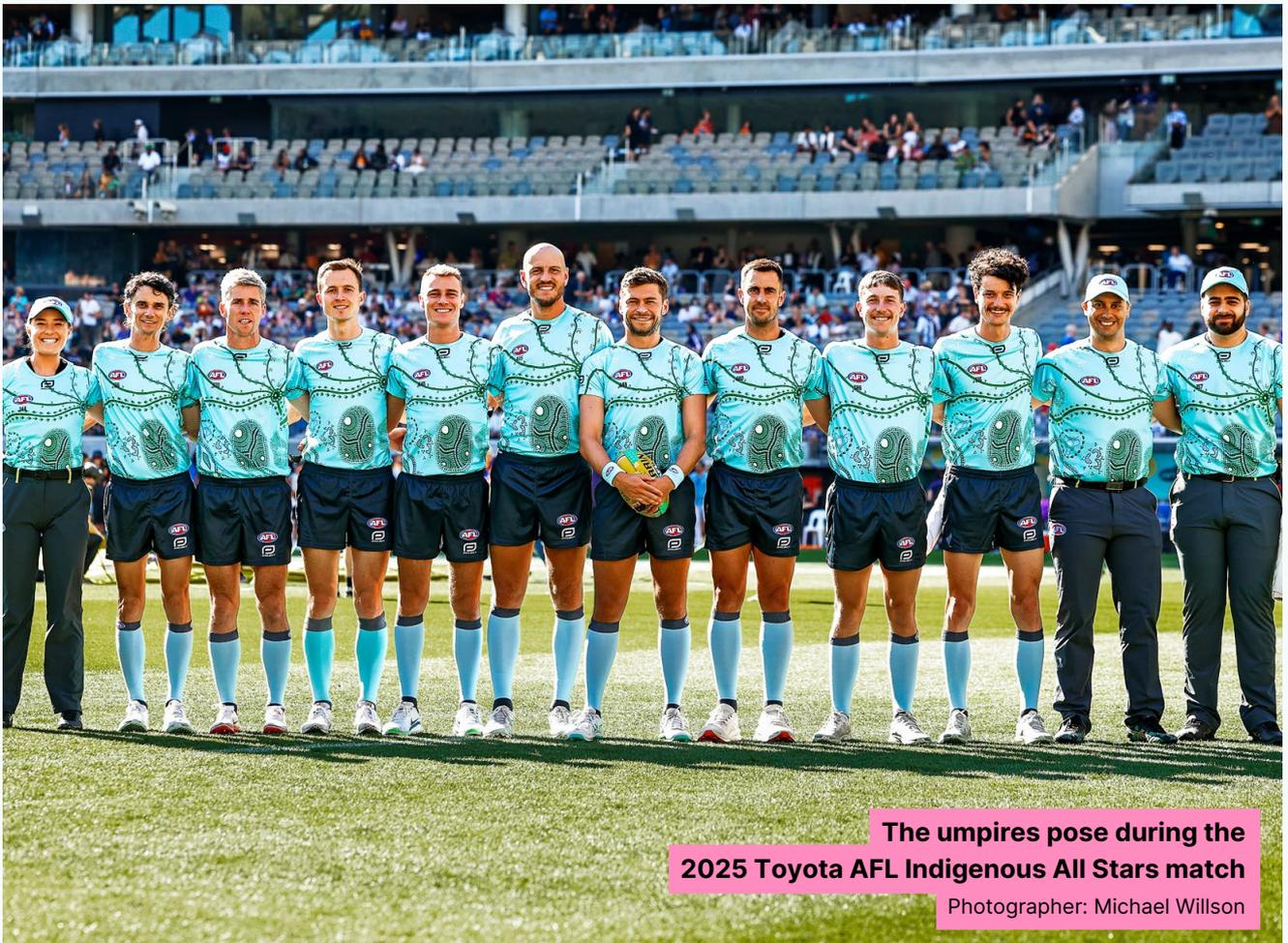
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The Sherrin features the Noongar word "Miidj," meaning 'ball,' and featured the river symbol. The other panels represent the boodjar (land) and kelp (water). The boodjar panel featured native animal tracks and bush foods as circles. The kelp panel features symbols of river, special places, and rain. The Sherrin is stamped with the Sportable symbol to allow for smart ball technology to be used, if desired.

## UMPIRE UNIFORM

The umpires wore uniforms representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and stories. The uniform, which was the same design used in the last two Sir Doug Nicholls Rounds, has been designed by Joshua James, a Noongar Wandandi Boodja man and current umpire. Josh has been involved in umpiring for more than 20 years and is currently umpiring AFLW and VFL games with aspirations to make the AFL. If successful, he would be only the second Aboriginal person to umpire at the highest level of the game, after Glenn James OAM achieved this in the 1980s when umpiring two VFL Grand Finals. Josh is also an umpire coach and the Umpire AFL Aboriginal Ambassador, a nationwide role in which he assists Aboriginal umpires and coaches in further development.

The artwork is called Moorditj Koondarm, which means “Strong Dreams” in Noongar language. The overall story showcased how strong, resilient, and self-determined Aboriginal people are, and the unity of people coming together.



**The umpires pose during the 2025 Toyota AFL Indigenous All Stars match**

Photographer: Michael Willson



**Caleb Serong, Liam Ryan and Jade Dolman at the Indigenous All Stars Guernsey and Sherrin unveiling at Mardalup Park on January 16, 2025**

Credit: Will Russell/AFL Photos



## CONNECTION - CULTURE - LEGACY - STRENGTH

# CONCLUSION

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The Indigenous All Stars event was more than a sporting occasion; it was a demonstration of cultural pride, mentorship, and resilience. The connections made, the stories shared, and the support shown reinforced the importance of cultural identity, belonging, and collective strength. This event was not only a celebration but also a powerful reminder of the strength of community and the unwavering support mob have for one another. The overwhelming turnout reaffirmed that when given the opportunity, the community will always come together to uplift and celebrate its own. Additionally, the game itself became a symbolic platform for reconciliation, demonstrating that Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities can come together through sport with respect, support, and shared pride in the achievements of all players.





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1. Welcome to Country Performance  
2. Bradley Hill Leads War Cry 3. Bradley Hill Signs Indigenous Flag

Photographers: Michael Willson/Dylan Burns



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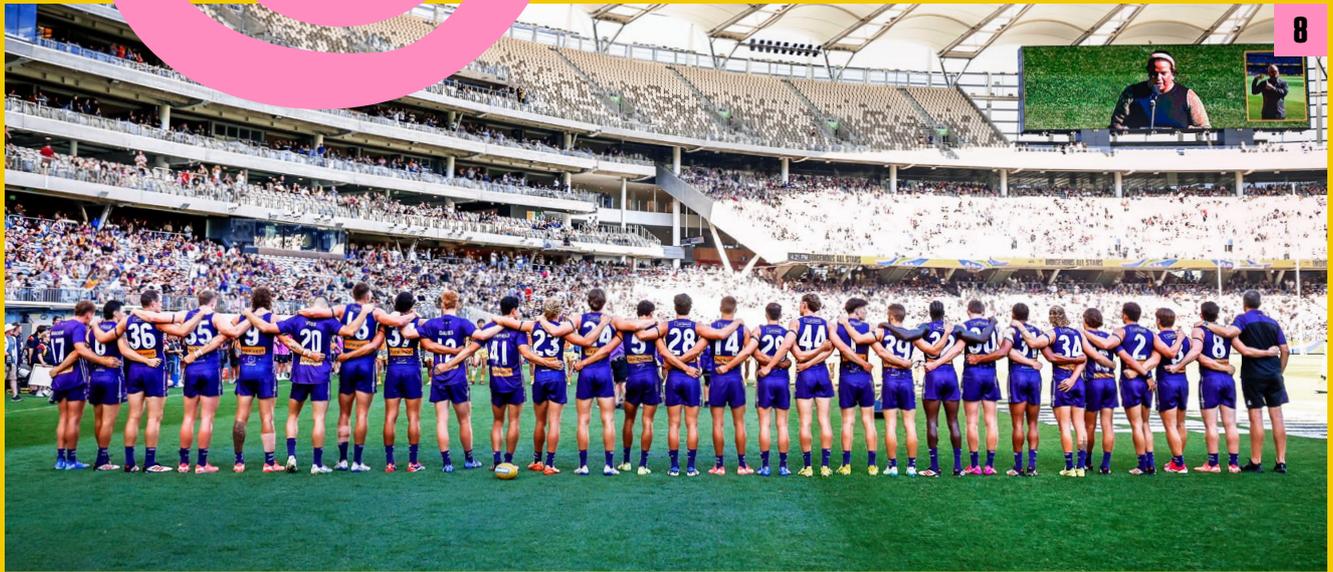


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**4. Liam Ryan Celebrates with Family, 5. Michael Walters Interviewed by Eddie Betts and Shaun Burgoyne, 6. Mark Williams and Paul Vandenberg, 7. AFLW players Dakota Davidson, Heidi Talbot, Aleisha Newman, Kaitlyn Ashmore, Gemma Houghton, Zipporah Fish, Jasmin Stewart, Courtney Hodder, Ally Anderson, Gabby Biedenweg-Webster**

Photographers: Michael Willson/Dylan Burns



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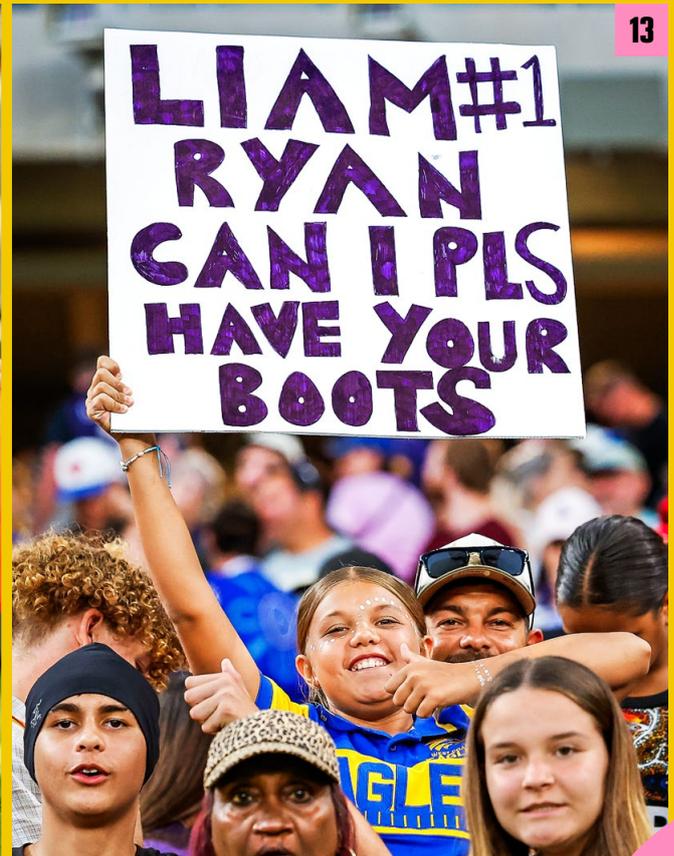
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8. Fremantle Players Lineup for Prematch Ceremony and National Anthem  
9. Bobby Hill Celebrates a Goal with Teammates, 10. Stephen Michael and Michael Walters embrace, 11. Kysaiah Pickett of the All Stars celebrates

Photographers: Michael Willson/Dylan Burns



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12. Jason Horne-Francis of the Indigenous All Stars kicks a goal, 13. Liam Ryan Fan, 14. Indigenous All Stars players pose

Photographers: Michael Willson/Dylan Burns

