**Celebrating NAIDOC**

The AFL’s annual round recognising and celebrating indigenous players and culture is named in honour of Sir Doug Nicholls. Sir Doug, who epitomised the spirit of reconciliation, played 54 games for Fitzroy and was a brilliant all-round athlete. The first Aboriginal person to be knighted, he also served as Governor of South Australia and was devoted to the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

In 2020, the AFL is recognising WA Football Hall of Fame inductee **Sydney (Syd) Jackson**. Syd played 254 games (East Perth 104, Carlton 136, Glenelg 13, WA 1) between 1963 & 1977, and kicked 265 goals across his career. His career highlights include:

* Carlton Premiership player 1970, 1972;
* East Perth Fairest and Best 1966;
* Hayward Medal (SWNFL) 1961, 1962;
* East Perth Team of the Century 1945-2005;
* Indigenous Team of the Century 2005;
* West Australian Football Hall of Fame 2015;
* Australian Representative “Galahs”1968 Australian Football World Tour.

Syd enjoyed dual premiership success with the powerful Carlton club of that era, and as the only indigenous player in that competition for the majority of his career he played a pioneering role for his people. He suffered the racism that characterised football in those less enlightened times but his gentlemanly demeanour and popularity did much to alter perception.

Syd ascended to football greatness from very harsh childhood circumstances. He was part of the stolen generation, and at the age of three, was made a ward of the State, along with his two sisters, and he didn’t see his sisters or parents again for 30 years. He was then sent 980 km south west to Roelands Native Mission near Bunbury. This place of strict discipline and occasional violence was his home until the age of 15 but the one saving grace was football. In the highly competitive Roelands environment, young Syd began to develop significant skills in the Australian game.

The greatest positive influence in Jacksons early life was Dr Ern Manea, then President of South Bunbury Football Club. He took Jackson into his home and treated him like a son. By the age of 18, he had won two Hayward medals as the best player in the South West National Football League.

Heading to East Perth in 1963, Jackson became an overnight sensation. Playing in the centre, his uncanny ball handling skills and brilliant kicking with both feet attracted much favourable comment. He tied for the 1963 Sandover Medal with Ray Sorrell but was unfortunately ineligible having been suspended for 2 weeks for striking. In the five years at East Perth Syd Jackson never played reserves football and played 104 games from a possible 112.

In 1968, Jackson headed to Carlton and due to a clearance dispute had to sit out of football for the season, but acted as the team’s runner and missed a premiership opportunity when the Blues broke a 20-year drought. Once eligible to play in 1969, he quickly stood out for his genius on a half forward flank. Jackson saw opportunities that few others did and dazzled with his ball handling, kicking and evasive skills. He was regarded as one of the best on-the-run drop kicks in the game and had a highly developed goal sense. He played an important role in the epic come from behind 1970 Grand Final victory with a freakish left foot snap goal from the boundary during the third quarter fightback and also contributed well in another premiership win in 1972.

After 8 seasons and 136 games for Carlton, Syd Jackson accepted an opportunity to play in the SANFL with Glenelg (13 games in 1977). His senior career thus spanned 15 seasons and 3 states during which he played 254 games. In retirement he remains very proud of his legacy and status as a trailblazer for Aboriginal footballers. “I’m just so proud that a lot of Aboriginal players who came after me appreciated I’d gone before them and made it a bit easier for them”.

All football fans appreciate the brilliance that Syd Jackson had on the game of Australian Rules Football, but more importantly the role that he played in having a positive impact on Aboriginal Football across three states.

**NAIDOC Round**

Both WAFL and Community Football Clubs across Western Australia will take a moment this weekend to recognise NAIDOC round, and the positive impact that Aboriginal Footballers have had on the game of Australian Rules Football in this State.

As we work towards reconciliation, all of football must continue to stand united against racism. Clubs and Leagues will come together to celebrate NAIDOC Round, and this may take the form of a Welcome to or an Acknowledgement of Country prior to games, smoking ceremonies, wearing of indigenous designed jumpers, and indigenous players or local community elders tossing the coin.

Please join with us to celebrate NAIDOC Round, and our united stand against racism at all levels in Australian Rules Football.