



## Something Magical about Majak

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When the AFL started getting serious in the late 90's about racial vilification, I was more than a tad cynical. I was sure the powers that be were authentic in wanting to create a more hospitable culture for aboriginal players (the prominent minority at the time) but I believed the zeal was probably borne out of the desire to choose from a bigger talent pool of potential players; particularly as some of the pioneering indigenous players like Michael Long and Nicky Winmar were so exciting to watch and contributed so much. Slowly but surely people touched by these players through their mutual love of sport began to understand how racism strikes at the core of a person and dishonours them.

I am sure players themselves have grown a great deal playing alongside those of so many cultural and racial backgrounds. There is nothing like the collective striving for a prized goal that creates cohesion and dulls the differences between team members.

There was another momentary glitch a few years ago when commentators began talking up their reverse bigotry; constantly referring to many indigenous players as 'gifted' and freakishly talented. Then we saw an article in the print media reminding us all that these aboriginal players work so hard at their craft and would not remain professional footballers if they didn't. To say it all comes so easily is to diminish the work done by them and those who mentor them to be virtuosos of the game. Again, we were given cause for pause.

And so to the present day and a young man of Sudanese origin, Majak Daw, a role model to his people and a man proud to call Australia his second home, is vilified by a few ignorant people at a football match. And we have witnessed almost universal condemnation and so should we because while people who harbour such views may not all be quieted, they need to know their outward manifestations of such bigoted views in a public place will not be tolerated by others. It is from the outcry by ordinary spectators that the children of those who would mock and taunt out of ignorance and jealousy may begin to understand that heading down the same path will get them nowhere. Let the bigots watch TV and scream abuse from the comfort and sanctity of their couches at home for we won't change them all but we don't want them at our stadia and on the sidelines at our local footy matches.

Media commentators have far too much influence but how refreshing it is when they use it to send the right messages.

I wrote a number of years ago about the Des Hedland/Adam Selwood sexual harassment case. I said that the football field is the players' workplace and they deserve "quiet" enjoyment of it. Sadly we have a way to go regarding respect on gender grounds but we are kicking goals in relation to racial vilification.

We get the behaviour we are prepared to put up with. We get the culture we deserve. I am no longer cynical. I believe we stand taller now than we did before Majak.

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