



THE ABORIGINAL SOCCER TRIBE

A HISTORY OF ABORIGINAL INVOLVEMENT WITH THE WORLD GAME

JOHN MAYNARD

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Magabala
Books



*This book is dedicated to the memory of two champions on and off
the football pitch — Charlie Perkins and Johnny Warren.*

*Aboriginal Affairs and soccer have been my passions and where
I could work out my problems through both of those two things ...
Soccer was where I got my satisfaction, my fulfilment.*

Dr Charles Perkins AO

Good luck with your mission — you have my 100 per cent support.

Johnny Warren MBE, OAM, BEc, ASM, CM

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Jade North hoists the trophy at the A-League grand final —
Newcastle Jets versus Central Coast Mariners, Sydney Football
Stadium, 24 February 2008.



Department of
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the Arts



Foreword

I was deeply flattered when Professor John Maynard asked me to provide the Foreword to such an important work on Australian Aboriginal peoples' influence on Australian soccer. I first met John Maynard when he was an undergraduate student at the University of Newcastle — then we discussed political activism and Aboriginal jockeys. A short time later our paths crossed again, when he was working on Aboriginal health, also at the University of Newcastle, and then again in Canberra in 2004 — this time the topic was soccer.

John had started researching his book and had talked to members of Charles Kunmantjay Perkins' family and John Moriarty. As children Perkins, Moriarty and I were all removed from our families. John Moriarty and I came from the Northern Territory to New South Wales in 1942, because of the War, and all three of us were removed by the Church of England to a boy's home located at Semaphore South, near Port Adelaide. We were raised on Aussie Rules but our sporting skills were more appreciated by the swarms of 'new Australians' who attracted us more and more to soccer. As very young men we chose to associate with sporting bodies that treated us with respect and that we could afford — gifts of sporting equipment made it possible for us to play soccer whereas, in other codes, we couldn't afford our own equipment. Also, in other codes we were not allowed to change in the same dressing rooms and use the same showers as white Australians. These were some of the disadvantages we faced and are common themes in most of the Aboriginal peoples' lives encountered in John's work.

In *The Aboriginal Soccer Tribe*, John reaches back to the past and demonstrates how Aboriginal social consciousness can propel Aboriginal

people into the pursuit of the things they love and the things that give them the opportunity to display their skills. This is evidenced in the success of stars such as John Moriarty and Charles Kumantjay Perkins. I followed in their footsteps by playing first division in Adelaide, leaving for England in 1961 and finally returning to Canterbury, Bankstown, in 1964. However, soccer could not support a wife and family so the alternative was work by day and study by night. I was drawn into Aboriginal politics in the same way as Perkins and Moriarty.

The Aboriginal Soccer Tribe also looks at the involvement of Aboriginal women in soccer, the women who, in many ways faced double the struggle and who have given so much to the game — names such as Karen Menzies, Felicity Huntington and Bridgette Starr.

John also looks into the future and asks: with the looming tsunami of soccer's popularity, is there hope for the many Aboriginal people looking to catch its success? What John is referring to is both the flood of people moving to urban areas for a better life than their parents experienced and the paucity of infrastructure in large rural Aboriginal populations, which are scenes of lingering disadvantage. The question is: do the soccer bodies have a social conscience? And will the rise of Aboriginal women in the game and the popularity of small games like Futsal help bring the Human rights for which Aboriginal people are entitled?

Looking into the future, John plants front and centre the fact that soccer has, by definition, forgotten Aboriginal people in its zest for self-development. Individual clubs such as Port Thistle blindly supported us because, without us it would not have existed. Dominated by cricket and Australian Rules, migrants had to beg for playing space and were targeted by Australia's press. What brought us few players to soccer was often the fact that our skills were transferred from Aussie Rules when we were driven away from that code. We chose migrants because they respected us.

When we look to the future of Aboriginal people in soccer it is easy to be optimistic, but, as John points out in the final pages of this book, the time is now ripe for the FFA to provide the support and the framework in which the passionate advocates and players of Indigenous soccer can succeed.

Associate Professor Gordon Briscoe (Adjunct) AO, 2011

Acknowledgements

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Johnny Warren was an inspiring and passionate soccer aficionado. Although too ill at the time to undertake an interview with me, my discussions with him on the phone and his correspondence delivered inspirational support for the project. I know Johnny Warren and Charlie Perkins would understand my use of the word 'soccer' as opposed to their preferred term of 'football'. I wanted to clearly distinguish the game — from an Aboriginal perspective — from the other football codes in this country, codes which many Aboriginal players have excelled at.

Finally, my own family: Vicky, my wife and history partner, whose support, advice, love and company I adore. Admittedly she is no sports fan, but she has put up with my soccer obsession with understanding, even allowing me to disappear to South Africa for my 2010 World Cup pilgrimage. My boys, Ganur, Kaiyu and Kirrin Yurra, who all kick the round ball and hopefully will retain the love I developed at an early age for this special game.

John Maynard

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Dr Charles Perkins AO

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