



Michael Long and Derek Kickett are two legendary footballers who not only exemplify Indigenous excellence on the field; they are also proud role models and spokesmen for their people and their community. Following their retirement from professional football, both men have continued to utilise their profile to further the advancement of Aboriginal people in sport, politics and Australian society.

Fittingly, both men were recently involved in an historic tour which took a group of talented young Indigenous AFL players to South Africa to take part in a three match series against the South African Buffalos.

"Part of my role on the tour was meeting with the South African government and having a look at the ongoing promotion and development of the game," says Michael.

"But we were also there to learn from each other, and give these kids an experience they will remember for the rest of their lives."

The side was co-coached by Derek, who is now the AFL's Indigenous Programs Manager.

"It was good to be working with young players," he says. "Especially when they want

to listen and they want to learn. Many of them had never left Australia before, but they handled the trip really well. Some got homesick, but they stuck it out and had a good time. That was the main thing – that they enjoyed themselves."

AFL football is a blossoming sport in South Africa, with up to 2500 players participating across the country. The AFL predicts that the game will grow nationally, with 10,000 players expected to be taking part by 2008. The area is seen as a massive talent pool, with the Indigenous Africans athletic ability in AFL football comparable to that of the Indigenous Australian stars. There is the hope that eventually we will see more and more Indigenous players from South Africa progressing into the AFL.

"You can see the rugby and soccer influence in the way they kick and move the ball," Michael says. "A few of their players really stood out. I think they are picking up the game really quickly – they sure have plenty of raw talent."

As well as providing a great opportunity to further promote the sport, the tour also aimed at developing football and leadership skills in the young Indigenous players

from Australia.

"Education was a major factor," Derek explains. "We really wanted to get the message of the importance of an education across to the player. We talked about staying in school – personally I left half way through year 11 because I was homesick, and a lot of other Indigenous players who have played in the AFL have done the same kind of thing."

"So Longie and I really reinforced how important it is to get an education, because the average career of an AFL footballer is only three years – they really need to think about a career down the track."

Michael also encouraged the boys to make the most of their experiences on tour, and believes that the lessons learnt will put them all in good stead for the future.

"Not all of them will become footballers, but what they have seen and learnt will have an impact on their lives, what they do and the choices that they make in the future," Michael says.

"That's one of the things we spoke to them about – that they are the next generation, you know? How they are going to be the ones who will take over the next role, my role, Derek's role, the roles of our health workers and all those



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They also visited Robbin Island, the prison where Nelson Mandela was held, and met and talked with Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who conducted a special service for the touring team at St George's Cathedral in Capetown.

"We went around to some of the shanty towns in Soweto, which was a bit of an eye-opener for some of our boys," says Derek. "For others it was similar to

"There are four or five players with the potential to go on and play AFL football. But the team wasn't picked just on talent, it was also picked on character, and they were all really terrific."

While seeing the sport take a foothold in South Africa is great news for the AFL, for Derek and Michael the ultimate reward was watching two of the oldest and proudest cultures in the



important areas where we need guys to put their hands up. We told them – it's important you guys realise how important you are to the future of Australia."

The three games, including one International rules match, were played in Potchefstroom, Mafikeng and Cape Town. The South African team has also been invited to tour Australia in February next year. The tour will include a curtain-raiser match for the AFL Indigenous All-Stars Game.

"We had around half dozen boys who were really outstanding," Derek says. "Our kids were 15 to 18 years of age, and some of the guys we're playing against were 24 to 25-year-old men, so there was plenty of mental toughness shown by some of the kids out there. It was a good experience and the boys handled it really well."

While the Australian Indigenous side were triumphant in all three matches, the tour was about much more than just results on the field. A township west of Johannesburg. There they experienced first-hand both sides of South African society – the incredibly rich and the incredibly poor.

missions that they, their parents or grandparents have lived in.

"When we went to Soweto there was one woman who told us that she had 13 people living in two bedrooms. Well, that's not uncommon in many communities back in Australia as well."

The communities that the touring team visited embraced them with open arms, looking after their guests very well.

"We got spoiled over there," Derek laughs. "The food was terrific!"

"But some of the boys were quite upset to be eating such good food when just down the road there were kids really struggling."

The triumphant Indigenous side was co-captained by Nathan Krakouer, a relation of the legendary Krakouer brothers Jim and Phil and Richmond goal sneak Andrew Krakouer. Nathan was one of standout players in the team, and earned plenty of praise from the touring officials.

"Many of the boys displayed great leadership qualities," Michael says. "They definitely came together as a group and some really stood out."

world come together to learn and grow from one another.

"Seeing 24 Indigenous boys at such a young age leading Australia and making it over there, and sticking it out for 14 days makes me very proud," says Derek.

"Sometimes we were up at six in the morning and wouldn't get home until ten at night. We had some pretty big days, which takes its toll. But the boys were terrific."

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ACTIVITY 1: READING FOR MEANING

Circle the correct answer:

1. What is the main idea of this article?
 - a. A group of talented young AFL footballers took part in a three match series in South Africa with Michael Long and Derek Kickett.
 - b. Hopefully more and more Indigenous South African players will find their way into the AFL.
 - c. The talented footballers who toured South Africa not only enjoyed themselves and developed their football skills, they also promoted the sport and gained skills as future leaders.
 - d. It is important for footballers to focus on their education so they have a career after football.

ACTIVITY 2: TRUE OR FALSE?

1. Derek Kickett coached the Australian team.

T F

2. The sport of AFL is growing in popularity in South Africa.

T F

3. According to Derek Kickett, the average career of an AFL footballer is over 10 years.

T F

4. The Australian Indigenous side won two out of their three matches.

T F

5. The touring Australians visited Robbin Island where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned.

T F

6. Jason McCartney warmed up the South African team before the match.

T F