



LAST LINE
NICK HATZOGLU

Together as one

The AFL has embraced a multicultural football program that will benefit ethnic groups.

The role Australian Football has played in the ethnic communities needs to be celebrated. Over the years, we have seen some familiar names not only grace our playing fields but they have been proud to promote and share their ethnicity.

Consider these great names from the past: Ron Barassi, Peter Daicos, Carl Ditterich, Robert DiPierdomenico, Glen Jakovich, Alex Jesaulenko, Sam Kekovich, Tony Liberatore, Wayne Schimmelbusch, Sergio and Stephen Silvagni, Paul Van Der Haar and Murray Weideman to name a few.

Then you have today's stars, including Scott Camporeale, Josh Francou, Anthony Koutoufides, Daniel Giansiracusa, Angelo Lekkas, Paul Licuria, Matthew Pavlich, Simon Prestigiacomo, Peter Riccardi, Mark Ricciuto, Nick Riewoldt, Saverio and Anthony Rocca, Richie Vandenberg and Brett and Michael Voss, who have all made significant contributions to football.

Even the AFL's chief executive officer, Andrew Demetriou, hails from an ethnic background, being the son of Cypriot parents who migrated to Australia more than 50 years ago.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the AFL, in a joint initiative with Football Victoria, has established a Multicultural Football Program in partnership with the Department for Victorian Communities to engage people from diverse cultural backgrounds to broaden both the participation and fan base in Australian Football.

Recently, I was appointed the AFL's multicultural coordinator to develop and implement a community-building program involving young people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities throughout Victoria.

The AFL will initiate strong working relationships with other agencies dealing with multicultural programs that will complement the Multicultural Football Program objectives.

The three key objectives are:

1. Introduce Australian Football as part of settlement and integration;
2. Implement community capacity building in culturally and linguistically diverse communities;
3. Influence community leagues and clubs to embrace multicultural diversity.

The target market will comprise the whole non-mainstream recruiting grounds. This can be identified as all migrant, new arrival and refugee groups. The net will be cast far and wide to assist

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Australian Football has a unique capacity to capture the hearts and minds of people of all walks of life. Melbourne is recognised worldwide as a multicultural city. Almost one million of the city's 3.4 million people are from overseas.

Implementing a multicultural plan is not without its hurdles. Winning the confidence of the young players and their families, taking into consideration the problems of communication, transport, cultural background and getting to know how to play Australian Football, are some of the challenges.

We can learn a lot from the European experience in the 1960s and '70s and apply it to today's environment. We should be able to do it better now than then.

One of the biggest differences in today's environment is the varied and diverse amount of choices people have with their leisure pursuits. It is not just Australian Football, cricket or tennis any more. Therefore, sports have to be more strategic in their approach.

It has been well identified by the Victorian Multicultural Commission and the AFL that newly arrived immigrant and refugee people are placed at a great social disadvantage when they first migrate to Australia. They often feel disconnected and isolated from Australian social experiences. We hope the Multicultural Football Program will combat this level of isolation and encourage refugees and immigrant young people to become involved with Australian Football. It can become the glue that brings communities together.

The AFL is committed to increasing its level of engagement with Victoria's ethnic communities.

• Nick Hatzoglou is the AFL's multicultural coordinator. Further information can be obtained by contacting him at the AFL on (03) 9643 1928. ●



ALL WALKS: Stars such as Geelong's Peter Riccardi come from an ethnic background.