

ROB SALISBURY Beyond Football: 2014 Australian of the Year

As if it was yesterday, I recall the enjoyment and privilege of meeting, talking and flying with Adam Goodes.



I was at the Sydney Qantas Club Lounge awaiting a flight to Melbourne where I was to emcee and co-host a two day client event at the Convention & Exhibition Centre.

While sipping my coffee, I sort of did a double take when a well-dressed, tall and athletically built man walked in, ordered a coffee and stood about four meters away.

For those perhaps unfamiliar with Adam, it's a bit like seeing David Beckham of Soccer fame or Tom Brady, NFL Super Bowl Quarterback of the New England Patriots or Kobe Bryant, multiple NBA MVP with the Los Angeles Lakers Basketball Team in an

airport lounge and ordering a coffee near you.

Regularly featured in prime time sport updates as the long-time Captain of the Australian Football League (AFL) Champion team, the Sydney Swans, Adam is also a Qantas Ambassador like actor John Travolta, golfer Greg Norman, cricketer Michael Clarke, F1 Driver Daniel Ricciardo, Rugby great John Eales, super model Miranda Kerr and Olympic champion Kelly Cartwright.

Australian Sporting Royalty

One of just 14 AFL football players going back to the beginning of Australian Rules Football in 1896 to win the MVP Brownlow Medal two times, in 2014 Adam also broke a long standing record by playing in his 340th game to become the most enduring of indigenous footballers with his ability to play at top level sport over many, many years.



Defining Moment

On 24 May 2013, in the opening match of the AFL's annual Indigenous Round, a 13-year-old Collingwood AFL team fan abused Goodes by calling him an ape in a very public manner. This set in motion a firestorm of rage about racism that was still very apparent within Australian sports.

Eddie Maguire, President of the Collingwood Football Club in Melbourne apologized to Adam saying it had a zero tolerance policy towards racism with its fans and yet a week later he made his own mistake on national radio by making inferences to Adam and the forth coming play King Kong that set off even more comments about racism in sports.

The manner in which Adam dealt with the sudden media coverage and daily news is what saw him really earn his stripes into the main stream of public debate as someone who was well beyond just sports. In was in these moments, Adam shared his personal code of ethics, fairness and generosity in forgiving the girl and Eddie Maguire for the obvious errors they had both made about indigenous people and their rights at AFL players.

To Meet or not?

As Adam awaited his coffee, I got up, walked over to say hi, introduce myself and congratulated him on the way he had handled the racism controversy and national spotlight that the media had made newsworthy.

What got my attention when talking with him was his calm, cool and collective demeanour and humility.

I was quick to congratulate him on his football career, his accomplishments in community and national affairs as a spokesperson on Aboriginal and Indigenous Australian issues, I was aware that he also gets many requests of 'fans' wanting to get a picture or ask for an autograph.

While I left those two areas alone, it was interesting that he turned the conversation away from himself and asked where I was flying to and if it was business or pleasure.

Time to Fly

Within minutes of us chatting, I heard my flight to Melbourne being called out by the Qantas Club staff. In saying good bye, I said it was a pleasure to meet him and wished him well with his trip that day.

I found him very considerate, professional and easy going as if I had known him for years.



As I boarded the plane, I made a mental note of being in the company of someone who was a hero and leader to hundreds of thousands and perhaps millions of worldwide Sydney SWANS fans. An entire generation of young Aussie kids playing 'footy' in their hometown football clubs look up to this national leader, team player and community role model.

On Board

Imagine my surprise when I looked up from my seat to see Adam walking down the aisle of my flight and

smiling as he sat in a seat across and one up from me.

It was a funny moment as we laughed about running into each other so soon, yet as we buckled up, he was quick to say, *'Rob, enjoy your time in Melbourne and good luck with the conference'*.

As our plane stopped to disembark at the Melbourne arrivals gate, the Qantas team thanked us all as passengers for flying with them and of particular note, Adam Goodes one of the brand ambassadors who helped make our flight a bit more special with him on board.

Beyond Football

Since 1960, the annual award bestowed on the 26 of January (*Australia Day*) is known to shine a light on the person and their causes as an Australian of the Year recipient.

Adam's journey into *'actions and interactions'* (as he referred to in his Canberra ACT acceptance speech) will help bring value to all Australians in the role he accepted 26 January 2014 and beyond as 2014 Australian of the Year.

Rob Salisbury B. Com., CSP is a keynote speaker, sales facilitator and MC who has been hired for over 2100 events by 600 global firms, Universities and Associations in over 20 countries.

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