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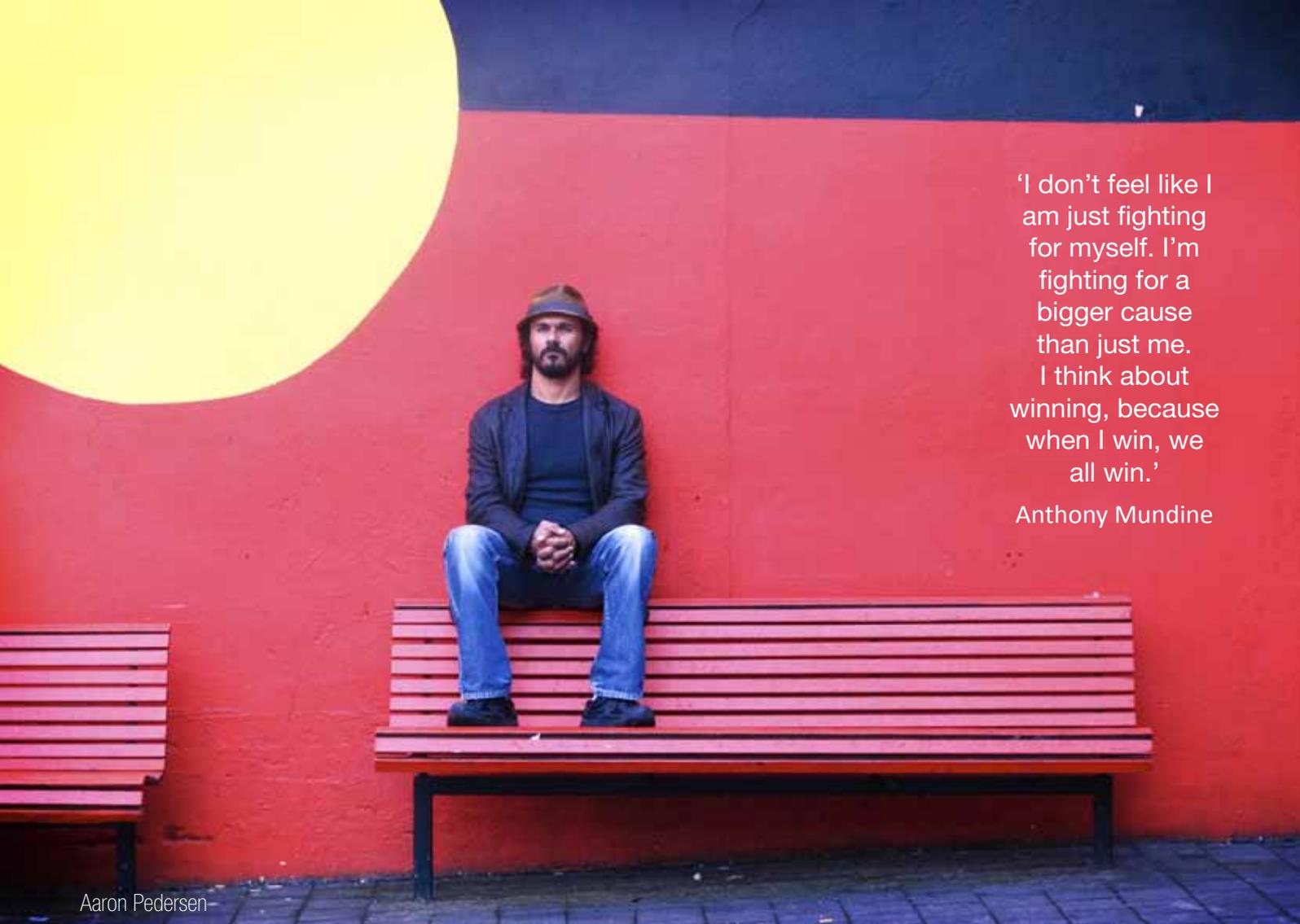
A STUDY GUIDE BY MARGUERITE O'HARA



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Aaron Pedersen

‘I don’t feel like I am just fighting for myself. I’m fighting for a bigger cause than just me. I think about winning, because when I win, we all win.’

Anthony Mundine

This is a program that showcases six Indigenous Australians who have had an enormous impact in a number of sporting codes. Some like Anthony Mundine and Nova Peris may be well-known while others such as Kyah Simon and Des Abbott may not be so familiar. They all have stories to tell of their lives and work as we watch them in action – sporting superstars. But the program also includes information about their off-field lives and backgrounds and we hear each one talk about challenges, achievements and continuing work as mentors, role-models and inspirational leaders in the Australian community. All are committed to making a difference to perceptions and expectations of Indigenous Australians.

Whilst *Who We Are – In Sport* uses the theme of sport to focus on the stories of six Indigenous Australians, the documentary is not just about sport. *Who We Are – In Sport* is also about how sport works as a catalyst for social change and has enabled people to overcome social and political barriers in Australia. It is a story about people who, at the elite level in their respective fields, manage the pressures of fame, social expectations and the legacy they will leave behind.

NOTE TO TEACHERS

This program is preceded with the following disclaimer that: ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are advised that this video might contain images of deceased persons’.

For students unfamiliar with this notice, teachers could point out that for many Indigenous people and communities it can be distressful to view and can be considered offensive to depict persons who have died. This program does contain images of people who have died.

Synopsis

Olympic gold medallist, world champion, captain of Australia, a competitor who revolutionised his sport, an athlete who achieved firsts at Olympic and Commonwealth Games – they are champions, sports stars, Indigenous Australians. In *Who We Are – In Sport* Nova Peris, Mark Ella, Kyah Simon, Des Abbott, Phil Krakouer and Anthony Mundine talk about their experiences, achievements and challenges on the track, in the ring, on the sports field – and in life.

Hosted by Aaron Pedersen and richly illustrated with contemporary and archive material of these and other Indigenous athletes in competition, *Who We Are – In Sport* offers a rich and stimulating insight into the lives of some of our greatest champions.



Aaron Pedersen

The film runs for approximately 48 minutes.

As several of the participants in this program acknowledge, we hear and see a great deal in the Australian media about Indigenous disadvantage in health, education, housing and employment. Negative stereotypes abound, and while it is true that many Indigenous Australians do suffer disadvantage, we rarely see inspirational stories about the endeavours of Indigenous Australians who are much more than sporting stars; they are also role models and community leaders. This documentary is not just about sport. It is also about how sport works as a catalyst for social change and has enabled people to overcome social and political barriers in Australia. This very enjoyable program goes some way to redressing an imbalance of perceptions.

Background

Indigenous Australians—Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders make up 2.3% of the total Australian population, according to the 2006 Census data. However, they are significantly over-represented in several sports, particularly in Australian Rules Football (AFL) where they make up 11 % of AFL lists. In 2011 there were 78 Indigenous players on AFL team lists. The figures are similar in Rugby League although fewer Indigenous Australians have played Rugby Union – in fact only 11 have played for the Wallabies.

Many Indigenous Australians have excelled in a number of other sports at elite levels, such as Lionel Rose and Anthony Mundine in boxing, Cathy Freeman, Nova Peris, Kyle Vander-Kuyp and Patrick Johnson in athletics and Yvonne Goolagong Cawley in tennis.

Despite the overseas success of an Aboriginal Cricket team in the 1860s, Indigenous Australians are under-represented in this sport at a national level with only three having played at the national level.

After watching this program, students might like to discuss why Aboriginal Australians are so unevenly represented in sports and why they are so spectacularly successful in certain sports such as AFL and NFL football.

Aaron Pedersen, an Australian actor and an acknowledged 'sporting tragic' narrates the program and conducts interviews (which are really more like chats), with all six of the athletes featured. He is one of Australia's best known actors, performing on stage, on the small screen and in many feature films.

For junior secondary students Activity 1 may be enough to engage them with the stories told in this film, while middle and senior students may like to tackle some of the more complex issues raised in the later activities in this guide about sport and Aboriginality.

Curriculum Relevance

Who We Are – In Sport would be an excellent program to show to secondary students at all levels in a number of curriculum areas. These include *Health and Physical Education, English, Personal Development, Indigenous Studies* and *Values Education*.

The 'draft shaping document' on *Health and Physical Education* for the new National Curriculum was published in March, 2012¹. The Introduction to this document notes that: *H & PE addresses how factors such as gender, sexuality, culture, ethnicity, socio-economic status, environments and geographical locations influence the health, well-being and physical activity patterns of individuals, groups and communities. In turn, it provides opportunities for students to develop the skills, self efficacy and dispositions to advocate for their own and others well-being, thereby making a positive contribution to the future for all.*

The proposed curriculum also emphasises the need for intercultural understandings between the many diverse groups and cultural backgrounds that make up the broad spectrum of Australian society.

Clearly, active and regular participation in physical activity has many benefits for everyone, whether they are aiming to compete at the highest level in their chosen field of sport or for health, fitness recreation, social and personal satisfaction. The individuals whose sporting journeys we follow in this film tick all the boxes in the Introduction to H & PE, described in the draft document.

Indigenous Australians are significantly over-represented in several sports, particularly in Australian Rules Football (AFL) where they make up 11 % of AFL lists.



WHO WE ARE – IN SPORT

A Bearcage
documentary for
Foxtel's Bio Channel

AARON PEDERSEN
Host

MICHAEL TEAR
Executive Producer

ALLAN COLLINS
Director and Co-Writer

HARRIET PIKE
Producer

CHRIS BAMFORD
Editor

MICHAEL COVE
Co-writer

MURRAY LUI
Director of
Photography

DAVID TRANTER
Location Audio

Student Activity 1

The Six stars – their stories

In the order in which they speak in the program they are:

- Phil Krakouer
- Mark Ella
- Kyah Simon
- Anthony Mundine
- Des Abbott
- Nova Peris

• Attach a main sport or sports to each individual from this list, first from your own knowledge, then as a class group. Are they involved in—

- Hockey
- Soccer
- AFL football
- Rugby League football
- Rugby Union
- Tennis
- Cricket
- Boxing
- Track and Field

Choose one of the six people and use the following set of prompts to build a profile of that individual as you watch the film. Not all areas listed will be addressed in the program by all the participants.

See Table 1 overleaf.

After watching the film and completing your notes, you could share your responses and discuss common experiences for these athletes.

Student Activity 2

What do you need to succeed?

To succeed in many sporting fields you need certain qualities which include determination, perseverance and passion. But there are other factors that help people achieve their dream to be the best they can in their chosen sport.

Thinking about what we see in this film about six very successful sportspeople, respond to the following questions in small groups.

1 *Body Type/physique*

We are not all born to run or kick or hit a ball or swim fast and some people seem to have more natural and innate skills in certain sporting areas than others. While in some sports, body shape and size is not necessarily an issue, e.g. in tennis, track and field, netball, swimming, volleyball, cricket, baseball, golf and table tennis, there are successful athletes of many different shapes and sizes. However, increasingly, fitness, stamina and speed are all important attributes for people wanting to achieve success in many sports. Many professional athletes are now often taller and stronger than average.

- To be successful in some sports you need to have certain physical characteristics. For instance, what are they in the following sports?
 - Men's and Women's Basketball
 - Rugby football

Above: Kyah Simon
and Aaron Pedersen

TABLE 1

Chosen sport or sports	
Family structure and birthplace	
Introduction to sport	
Education	
Big break into sport	
Age when first represented Australia	
Years when played sport at top level	
National representation	
Important awards and recognition	
Particular challenges	
Any racism felt	
Life after retirement	
Major goals	
Family support	
Surprising information	



- Boxing
- Weightlifting
- Distance running
- Rowing
- Gymnastics
- What are some of the physical characteristics of each of the people featured in this program?
- How can dieticians and other allied health professionals such as physiotherapists assist athletes reach their potential?

2 *Self-discipline/ motivation/ determination*

- What training demands are made on individuals wanting to achieve success at the highest level in their chosen sport?
- How can family support help young athletes persist with regular and often demanding training?
- How can the need to leave your hometown and family to undertake training and take up opportunities to play your sport impact on your drive to achieve?
 - For instance, how did the presence of his brother Jim make it easier for Phil Krakouer to become a successful player in Melbourne after leaving his family and community in Western Australia?
 - How was Des Abbott's transition to Perth made easier?
- Can perseverance and resilience be taught or even predicted in young sportspeople?
- Why is goal setting such an important factor in improving and extending skills in any endeavour?

Above: Mark Ella and Aaron Pedersen

3 *Starting early*

Many professional athletes start their specialised training early in life, often with parental or sibling support. Others just have a childhood of playing outdoors, kicking a football or running or hitting a ball against a wall.

- How does what we see and hear of these athletes' lives in their early years show us about the importance of starting early?
- What are some of the common factors in their family backgrounds?

Student Activity 3

The price of fame – the good, the bad and the ugly

People in my circumstance, if you can't give back at some stage, then there's something wrong with you.

.....To be able to give something back so precious to these young girls is what we call the girl effect, and it's about empowering Indigenous women— Nova Peris

Society wants to bring our people down and make us feel as though we're inferior. So we're always on a daily basis fighting for equality, and fighting for a place in society, you know what I mean? Just to be normal.

... All you see on the TV is stereotype figures... negativity. You know, drug addicts, alcoholics, drop-outs. The list goes on. But why is our mentality as people like that? You know, it's because the system and the structure feed us that—Anthony Mundine

The fame and public recognition that often goes with being a successful sports person can be quite overwhelming for young people. Sometimes a combination of lots of money, not enough to do in non-playing time or when injured, and being far from home can be hard to handle. But it can also establish a high-profile that can be a huge advantage in inspiring others.

- How do football organisations such as the AFL and NFL now try to help manage some aspects of the off-field lives of young players?
- What are some of the difficult situations players can find themselves in when they get into trouble with drinking, gambling and other potentially damaging activities?
 - Is such behaviour, as reported in the media, more common with players from Indigenous



backgrounds?

- Is it any different to the way many young people sometimes behave?
- Is it reasonable to expect our sporting heroes to be good role models both on and off the field? Do we expect such consistently high standards of behaviour from other public figures?
- Recently some high-profile retired sportspeople such as swimmers Ian Thorpe and Libby Trickett have returned to training in an attempt to kick-start their swimming careers. What might have been some of the factors that led them to make this decision? What kind of 'high' does Kyah Simon acknowledge about playing for Australia in front of an enormous crowd?
- What kind of work is often taken up by past players and athletes no longer competing? *People want to talk about closing the gap. I always say well what gap are we closing here, you know? Is it to assimilate us? Or do we really want Aboriginal people to be able to stay on the same flat platform? It's being able to change the minds of Aboriginal people. Can they wake up every day and have the same dreams and aspirations as whitefellas?* Nova Peris
- How has Nova Peris continued to be involved in Indigenous sporting ventures since she retired? Describe how she has been able to use her public profile to inspire and encourage girls and young women to pursue dreams to be the best they can?
- What does Kyah Simon do to encourage young Indigenous people to realise their dreams?
- What do many of these athletes acknowledge as being the most important factor in their success?
- Which of the athletes featured in this program most strongly exemplify the notion of absolute self-belief?

Student Activity 4

Indigenous sportspeople – a level playing field?

.....

What my brother {Jim} and I did on the football field was difficult. We were part of change, if you like, the way non-Indigenous people, the perception they had of Aboriginal people, you know. And their perception was that Aboriginal people couldn't play AFL football, they'd go walkabout, they are town drunks, they're smelly and all that.

...Nothing surprises you when it comes to racism back in the '60s and '70s—Phil Krakouer

Some Indigenous players have to cope with situations both on and off the field that can make it more difficult to stay grounded. However, statistically they are no more likely 'to go off the rails' than people from any other background. Here are several recent matters you could discuss.

1

Recently in Melbourne, a high-profile AFL Indigenous player has been the subject of intense media interest after he was charged with a number of offences following an alleged machete fight near Alice Springs. He had been home in the Northern Territory attending to family business when he apparently became involved in a violent altercation. The charges have yet to be heard. There has been a lot of media discussion about how this matter should be treated, which has included debate about whether the laws applying to other Australians should be applied in the same way to Indigenous Australians.

Above left L-R: Murray Lui (cinematographer), Allan Collins (director), Anthony Mundine, Aaron Pedersen (host), and David Tranter (sound recordist)

Above circles from top: David Tranter (sound recordist), Allan Collins (director), Murray Lui (cinematographer)

- Has this situation been reported in the media in a similar way to that of other footballers who have been involved in off-field incidents?
- Is there a stereotyped representation of indigenous AFL players in the media?
- See article *Indigenous greatness obscured by stereotypes* by Che Cockatoo-Collins. (Add to references)

2

There has also been controversy at the start of the season about an AFL player manager suggesting that clubs should be wary about recruiting Indigenous players unless they have a white parent. This has fuelled the debate about Indigenous players being unreliable.

'What if Indigenous Australians didn't play footy?' (Question posed by Sean Gorman at the release of his book, *Legends, the AFL Indigenous Team of the Century 1905–2005*.)

- How different would the Australian sporting landscape be if Indigenous Australians did not play football?
- Who has a right to determine and characterise the degree of 'Aboriginality' of Australians? I.e. if people identify themselves as being of Greek background or Aboriginal background, should this be accepted?

3

Several Indigenous footballers, including ex-Essendon AFL player Michael Long, have made positive contributions to the process of reconciliation, especially through sport. The Essendon Football Club, under coach Kevin Sheedy, successfully recruited many talented Indigenous players and has a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) in place, designed to assist Indigenous players coming to the city far from family and community. This scheme has also been launched by other AFL clubs including Richmond whose RAP is named after one of their greatest Indigenous players, Maurice Rioli.

- Research this scheme online and outline how the program works and how it is supported.

4

Once upon a time when we were playing and we were growing up, I mean it was open slather. You could call them whatever you want and the referee wouldn't do anything. And yeah, you'd be coping it from your opposition, from the people on the sidelines. But now I guess the protocols have changed and it's unacceptable in modern sport, and that's the way it should be.

When Nicky Winmar showed the world how proud he was, that was a momentous occasion...he

It doesn't matter who you are; sport will find out something about you. How you play, how you're fast, strong, cunning. Do you stick to the established way, or do you do the unexpected? Can you handle losing? Can you handle winning? I didn't really have those questions in my mind, but a great group of champions has given me answers.

Natural talent, heaps of it. But bloody hard work too. Pride in performance and in who you are, and in representing that to Australia and to the world. And in every case one more thing, not the fame, not the money, but the sheer bloody love of the game.

Aaron Pedersen

exposed the wrongs of sport...stood up for himself and his race— Mark Ella

- How can public gestures, such as Nicky Winmar pointing to his black skin on the football field in 1993 in response to continuing racist taunts from people in the crowd, become defining moments in Australian sporting culture?
- Almost 10 years on, how much has changed in the way Indigenous players are regarded and treated? How is racial vilification on the field now treated by the AFL and NFL?

References and further resources

Article exploring some of the difficulties Indigenous AFL footballers often face when they move from their country, home and family to play top-level football.

Jonathan Horn, *Away from the pack*, Saturday Age, Good Weekend Magazine, 24th March, 2012, pages 34 – 37

<http://starwin.com.au/2012/away-from-the-pack/>

Two articles by Sean Gorman from Curtin University on The Conversation website about:
1) Recent controversies concerning Aboriginal footballers and

2) The use of the term 'black magic' to characterise football skills

1) <http://theconversation.edu.au/what-if-indigenous-australians-didnt-play-footy-5964>

2) <http://theconversation.edu.au/black-magic-white-muddle-more-like-it-549>

Gorman has a long association with football and a particular interest in Indigenous footballers.

Sean Gorman, *Legends, the AFL Indigenous Team of the Century 1905–2005*, Aboriginal Studies Press, 2011.

Sean Gorman, *Brotherboys*, Allen and Unwin, 2005. The story of Jim and Phil Krakouer

There are many inspirational films and documentaries about people achieving their dreams against the odds through sporting success. Some of the most recent and best Australian films and documentaries include:

Playing for Charlie, feature film (Pene Patrick, 2008)

Two Fists, One Heart, feature film (Shawn Seet, 2009)

Never Say Die Matildas, documentary (Helen Barrow, 2008)

Running to America, documentary (Juliet Bishop, 2011)

Boxing for Palm Island, documentary (Adrian Wills, 2010)

ATOM study guides have been produced for these programs.

Endnotes

- ¹ <http://www.acara.edu.au/hpe.html>. Go to H&PE draft shaping document



Who We Are – In Sport is available on DVD from Ronin Films

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