



SYD JACKSON



RECORD

1963–1976

Games: 240: East Perth 104; Carlton 136

Goals: 243: East Perth 78; Carlton 165

State: Western Australia 1

Premierships: Carlton 1970, 1972

Club Best and Fairest: East Perth 1966

Life membership: South Bunbury Football Club, East Perth Football Club, Carlton Football Club

South Bunbury Team of the Century (centre)

East Perth Team of the Century (centre)

Carlton Hall of Fame: 2006

‘My first recollection of Aussie rules football and playing footy was all in the mission. There was no rules; it was just in the mission grounds and you just had to fight to get a kick and there was only one or two footballs anyway, with about fifteen kids trying to get a kick. So I guess that’s the way we started. There was no realisation as to how important football was, but it was a situation of three or four of us learning to have a kick and we were able to play against other schools. For us to get out of the mission and play different sports was important.’

Syd Jackson



For me if it wasn't for my football, I know my life as part of Australia's Stolen Generation could have been starkly different...I worked for what I got and there was a lot that I lost in terms of my family, culture, my language and important things like that. I had a lot of help from people who supported me and I worked hard to reward them by not failing.⁶¹

In 1968, Syd Jackson was set to go on the trip of a lifetime. He had been recruited by Carlton but was not able to play because of a clearance wrangle from his WAFL club, East Perth. Instead, he was hoping to show his skill on an international stage with a football trip later known as the Touring Galahs. It was organised by Ron Barassi and Harry Beitzel to showcase Australian Football and was set to take in Ireland, England and North America. Not only was it a chance for the VFL's elite to display the Australian code of football to the world but an end-of-season trip of epic proportions. There was only one thing Jackson needed, a passport.

Jackson went down to a passport agency in Melbourne's CBD. Here he filled out several forms in triplicate with the only section remaining blank being his birth details. Jackson handed the forms back to the clerk who looked over the papers. 'Mr Jackson,' the clerk commented warily, 'you need to furnish us with documentation of your birth before we can issue you with a bona fide passport.' Jackson shrugged. He did not feel particularly concerned because he knew there was some flexibility with his birth date and year, despite the records 'officially' showing it as 1 July 1944. Why should now be any different Jackson thought. 'Just ring the Office of Births and Marriages in Perth,' Jackson said as his mind wandered to the impending adventure to the northern hemisphere.

The attendant went inside his office, made the call and emerged some minutes later with a pained look on his face. 'Mr Jackson it appears there is no record of your birth in the Perth office. They have checked the electoral role and the birth records and you are not on there. Technically, you don't exist.' The words of the clerk rang in Jackson's ears. Jackson himself enquired, to see if this was the case. A few weeks later a letter about Jackson's identity was supplied by Mr

Frank Gare, Western Australia's last Commissioner of Native Welfare. In it the letter it said, 'Records for the period 1940 to 1951 state that no reference to the birth of Sydney Jackson can be found.'

If anyone does not understand the impact of the removal of Indigenous children from their families resulting from the Stolen Generations they should take notice of Jackson's life. Taken away by a formal arrest warrant when he was three, he was separated from his family for twenty years and would meet his parents only twice before they died.⁶² He was one of the lucky ones.

Jackson has absolutely no doubt that his mother, Jinna, and his father, Scottie, loved him, shown by his mother deliberately evading the police and the departmental gaze in their concerted attempts to track and capture 'half-caste' children like Jackson and his sisters. As both of his sisters had been removed and detained at the Moore River Native Settlement (made famous in the *Rabbit-Proof Fence* film), Jinna did everything in her power to ensure that Syd did not end up there, or in any other state-run institution. But the arm of the Native Affairs Department was long and powerful and eventually Jackson and Jinna were tracked down at Tarmoola station just near Leonora. Initially Syd was to be transferred 'under escort' to Sister Kate's but he ended up at Moore River Native Settlement with his sisters. After a short time, he was removed from his siblings and taken to Carrolup Native Boys School near Katanning, and then finally to Roelands Native Mission situated just between Collie and Bunbury in the southwest of Western Australia.⁶³

It would be years later that the pieces to the puzzle could start to be put into place, as Jackson explains:

For a long time I thought I was a Noongar because as a kid I was brought up in the southwest in a place called the Roelands Native Mission. Years later when I caught up with my sisters and other members of the family I learnt that I was born in Leonora which I learnt that I was part of the Wongi people out of Leonora and Kalgoorlie. My actual clan group is the Wongi people. I had very mixed feelings about that because you know you're living in Noongar country and you're bought up as a Noongar, then being told that you're from that area (the goldfields) it took some time to sink in over the years and to accept the fact that I'm from up there.⁶⁴