



Astounding journey of faith and dreams

THE manicured turf of the MCG is a long way from the red dirt of Yuendumu, a remote indigenous community in central Australia.

It is truly remarkable that Liam Jurrah was able to play one AFL match — he is the first fully initiated Aboriginal to do so — let alone become a vital element of the Melbourne Football Club's current team and future aspirations.

It is not a path he could have walked alone, and the author of his story, Liam's Anglo-Celtic brother Bruce Hearn Mackinnon, has clearly played a very significant role.

Hearn Mackinnon plays down his contribution, but in many ways his journey, which could be described as a path to enlightenment, is as fascinating as Liam's own.

Hearn Mackinnon's working class origins, politics and love of the Collingwood Football Club all amount to one thing.

But his social ideals were torn apart at Victoria Park in 1993, when St Kilda's Nicky Winmar — having copped a

torrent of racial abuse from some racist Collingwood supporters — lifted his jumper and proudly pointed to his black skin.

This was a pivotal moment for Hearn Mackinnon, just as it was in the history of the AFL and its relationship with indigenous Australia.

Hearn Mackinnon was a founding member of the Collingwood Industrial Magpies in 2002, along with Australian Industrial Relations Commissioner John Lewin, and this maverick Magpie coterie committed itself to promoting reconciliation between white and black Australia.

A trip to the heart of the Northern Territory and a very special relationship with the Yuendumu Magpies followed.

It was also in central Australia that Hearn Mackinnon met artist and former Collingwood player Rupert Betheras, another key member of "Team Jurrah".

Hearn Mackinnon could not have foreseen where his fascination with the overlooked

talent of desert footballers — nor the Industrial Magpies' desire to build a friendship with the Warlpiri people — would lead.

But it wasn't long before his inner-city home became known as the Warlpiri camp in Melbourne, and Hearn Mackinnon and his family were hosting frequent visitors from the Yuendumu Football Club.

So when Betheras, through his former Collingwood teammate Paul Licuria, arranged an opportunity for teenager Liam Jurrah to try out for a rookie spot with Collingwood, naturally the Hearn Mackinnon household took him in.

What happened after Liam's arrival, his rejection by Collingwood and the subsequent decision by the Melbourne Football Club to take a punt on the Warlpiri Wizard, becomes the heart of Hearn Mackinnon's story.

Football is only a small part of the story. Some of the events are chilling, but are told with great sensitivity.

What emerges is that Liam Jurrah is not just an amazing football talent, he is a remarkable young man. His resilience and determination to succeed, to rise above the heartbreak and "sorry business", set him apart.

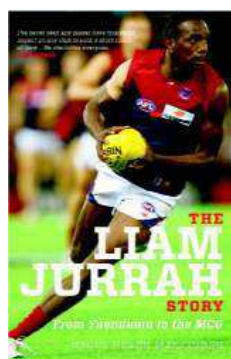
Liam Jurrah had the good fortune to have a support network that helped turn his dream to be an AFL star into reality.

His success will inspire others in the remote desert communities, and no doubt other clubs will be interested in offering other talented players an opportunity.

It is nice to believe, as the author does with some reservation, that Liam will be the flagbearer who others follow.

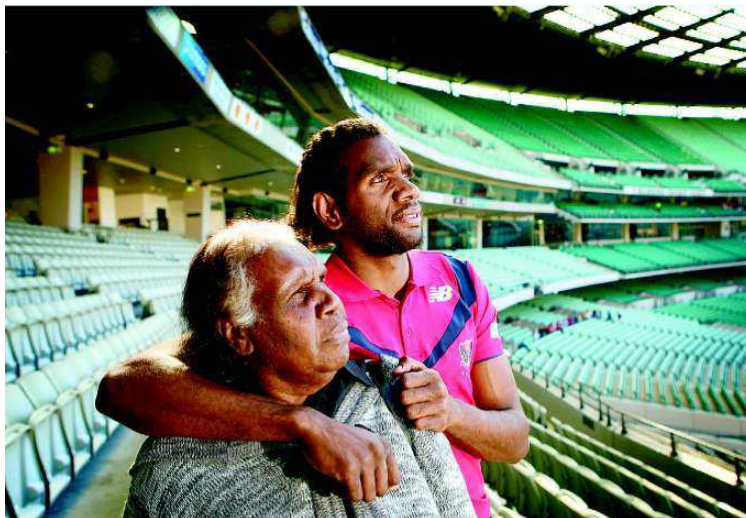
But the obstacles he has cleared to live his dream will be too great for most. It is incumbent on the AFL fraternity and all Australians to ensure we learn from *The Liam Jurrah Story*.

— SEAN STEVENSON



The Liam Jurrah Story – From Yuendumu to the MCG

Bruce Hearn Mackinnon
 Victory Books
 RRP \$24.99



DREAM OF STARDOM: Liam Jurrah with his grandmother Cecilly Granites at his book launch at the MCG