

Adam Goodes: I needed to go to my country to help heal the wounds

Georgia Mantle from Sydney University's student paper Honi Soit spoke to the newly retired AFL star about racism, constitutional recognition and his plans after football

- [Read the full interview on Honi Soit](#)



Adam Goodes says he needed to go back to where his people were from to heal the wounds of the booing controversy. Photograph: Robert Cianflone/Getty Images

Georgia Mantle

Wednesday 14 October 2015 08.50 AEDT Last modified on Wednesday 14 October 2015 10.03 AEDT

Former Sydney Swans player Adam Goodes has given his first interview since his retirement to Georgia Mantle, an Indigenous student at Sydney University. [The full interview can be read at Honi Soit.](#)

After struggling at the start of the year, you appeared to find some of your best playing form towards the end of this season. What do you think inspired it?

There came a point this year when I knew that it was going to be my last season. I don't know, I think when you know it's going to be your last, you just really want to play the best you possibly can, and it was just — not that you train harder, or smarter, or go about it differently — I just think that knowing and playing on the edge and knowing that this is going to be your last couple of weeks, that you just really want to enjoy it and you really want to go out there and do your best. Getting into that mindset really helped me get to that level.

So you were always planning to retire at the end of this season? How long have you known?

I probably knew about two months before the season finished.

Is everything that has happened to you within the game in relation to racism connected to why you decided to retire or is that just one reason?

All the booing and everything, that was another piece of the puzzle that made my decision [to retire] quite easy

I think it's one of many reasons. You know obviously my stand on racism is that it's unacceptable and that we should always stand up to it. I think going into this season, you know, I'm 35 years old, I played a couple of games in the reserves this year to get my fitness back, so I think there was a lot of factors. And obviously with all the booing and everything, that was another piece of the puzzle that made my decision quite easy.

After the booing and the repercussions of that, you didn't make any media appearances and stopped playing for a period of time. What was that period like for you? What were you doing to make sure you were OK and how were you dealing with that experience?

I just needed to be around people who really understood how it felt to be in that position. For me, I just needed that support from those people so, it wasn't until the day after that West Coast Eagles game that it really hit me, and I was really down and out and I didn't want to go training on Monday. I just figured that, for me to get the best out of myself and do the right thing by myself, I really just needed to step away and find out what I really wanted to do and hopefully getting back to where my people are from and getting out bush could really re-energise me and help heal those wounds. Yeah that's what I did, I went out country and it was amazing. It was just great to be out there.

To be honest, I didn't want to come back. But you know I did. And I felt better when I did. I just needed that support and the love of everyone at my football club and my partner, my family — that made it a little bit easier to come back. Obviously the booing didn't stop, but I was able to be a lot stronger mentally and physically to deal with that for the last couple of months, knowing that it was going to be my last couple of months.

Following up on something you said, the importance of going back to country and being with community: when you're away from your country and your mob, how do you still connected to that while you're still on the field? Especially when you are going through a lot of emotional things?

Yeah you just have to be true to yourself, know where you come from, make sure that your relationships with family members back in country, back home, are really strong so that connection is always there. Whenever you are feeling down or feeling a bit shitty, you do tell someone, you do have conversations with those people, because you need to let people know how you're feeling. And for me, I'm a big meditator, so when I meditate, I meditate about country and how I'm feeling when I'm back there and use that as the strength.

When you say things about people, it can be quite confronting and the load that you can bear can be quite heavy

You've taken such a stance on racism and supporting Indigenous communities and people for a big portion of your career, some people consider that quite a political move. Do you think it is a responsibility of all sports people to take a stance like that, or do you think it's something more personal that you just felt you needed to do?

No, no, it's definite personal thing. I don't think there's too many Aboriginal people out there who are successful that don't want to help make gains for our people. And it definitely is a

personal choice. I don't put that responsibility on anybody else, because it has to be your own personal choice, it has to be you that wants to do it and have the skills to do it as well. You need to be able to talk strongly about these issues but you also need to be strong enough to handle the criticism that you're going to cop as soon as you step into that role. Unfortunately, when you do say things about people, it can be quite confronting and the load that you can bear on your shoulders can be quite heavy.

How does all the media scrutiny/attention affect you, not only in your personal life, but when you're out on the field and playing, because it's sometimes hard to separate those things?

It is. I think media has a very important role to play, and unfortunately some people in the media can have very positive and negative effects on a large amount of people. I guess that's where you need good leaders in the industry to help steer the conversation so that one side doesn't get too heavily outweighed by comments that aren't true. So for me, you can't control the media, you have to work with media to get your message out there and you just hope that there's enough good honest reporting and people in the media that can get that job done.

After the announcement came out that you were retiring, there was also the announcement that you declined to take part in the lap of honor, or to be considered for the Madden medal. What was the motivation behind those decisions?

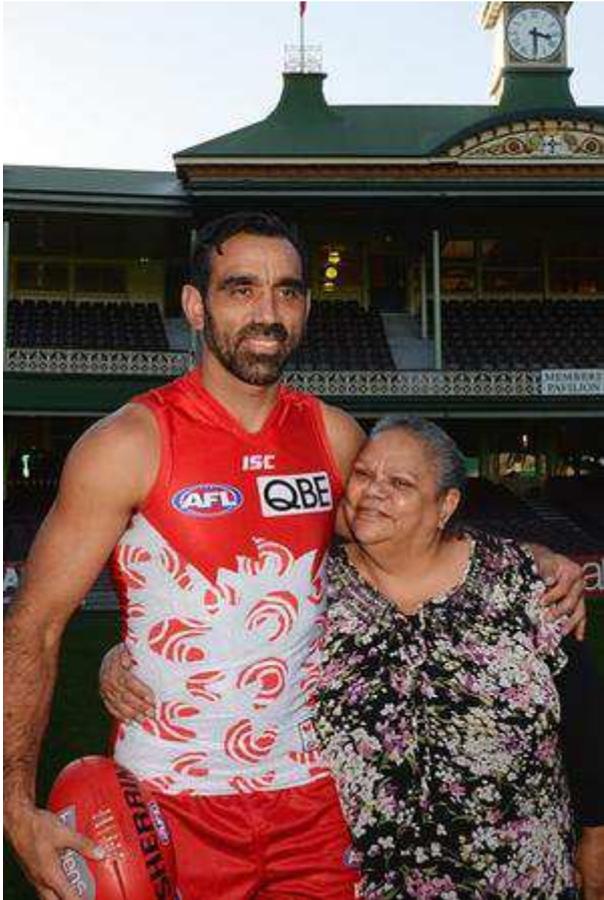
I was done. I was done a couple of months before that, I knew when I was finishing. I didn't want, once I'd finished footy, to be part of any other things that I had a choice in. At the end of the day, it's my choice to do the lap. At the end of the day, it was my choice not to be nominated for the Madden medal. I had my last football responsibility at the club Best and Fairest and that's what I was looking for. It was my supporters, my members, at that event, and you know it was a very safe environment for me to go to and give my sendoff to the people that mattered.

Now that you've finished football, what else does the future hold for you? What can you see yourself doing?

I can see myself doing a lot of the same, now I've got a lot more time on my hands. I'm looking forward to the exciting times going forward, I'm actually jumping on a plane today at 12:30pm, I'll be overseas for two months and I'll be back for Christmas. I'm really excited about that. I'm also still going to keep up the fight for saying no to racism and making sure that we get constitutional recognition for our mob, and still going to be fighting hard for [White Ribbon](#), and really helping men take responsibility when we try to stop domestic violence against our women and our communities.

With your work with Recognition, I feel, and you may agree, that there is a little bit of a divide within our community as to whether recognition, in terms of constitutional recognition, is really the best thing for our community. A lot of Indigenous people have taken a stand against it, and a lot of people like yourself still support it. What do you think? Why is it that you personally support the constitutional recognition over something like a treaty?

Well that's the conversation right there. I support Treaty as well because that would give our mob and our people so many more benefits.



[Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [Pinterest](#)

Adam Goodes with his mother Lisa Sansbury, unveiling the Sydney Swans' first ever Indigenous Round guernsey in May. Photograph: Dean Lewins/AAP

I think the movement right now—and I don't want to downplay what Treaty is when we're trying to compare it to Recognise, because I don't think we should compare it to Recognise—and the support that we have from both sides of government, is constitutional recognition. I just think that it's a really important thing that we change this document. This document has so many things in it that don't work for our people, and the biggest thing obviously is that it doesn't recognise us, and there's still parts of it which are racist to minorities in this country.

I think if the movement right now, for me and both sides of government; was supporting Treaty, and they wanted to really make sure this happened for our people, then I think that there would not be one person in Australia – Aboriginal or non-Indigenous – that shouldn't get behind that. I just hope that when people say Recognise isn't what we need right now, I think that we should just think about what we're trying to do at Recognise, and the way we need to change this language in this document so that we can then go forward and get Treaty, and get as much land back as we possibly can, or acknowledgement of land, at least.

So for you personally, would you say that getting constitutional recognition is really only the start, and it's a way then to push or more?

The reason why I became an ambassador for Recognise is as soon as I found out what they were doing, and what we were trying to change, it was a no-brainer for me. I wasn't brought

up on my own country, I don't have language, I have a strong connection to my country now, but Treaty to me has not been something that I've been a part of, I haven't been a part of that discussion. But being a part of the Recognise movement, I can just see that we can get a real big win on the board by changing that constitution, and making sure that this document acknowledges us and our people and our language and our culture forever by putting it into our constitution. I don't want it to be ever compared as "constitution versus treaty", because it never should be compared like that. I understand why our mob and the community feel that Treaty is a higher priority, I get that, but I just think that we can get a real big win with our constitutional recognition, and I'll be supporting both of those things—and I am supporting both of those things.

I think it should be a responsibility of every male to take a stance against domestic violence

You mentioned your support of the White Ribbon program about taking a stand against domestic violence. Do you feel that's a responsibility of you as a man, to stand up and say you're completely against violence against women?

I think it's the responsibility for everyone to take in our community, but I think men in our community are the ones that are committing these crimes against their families, their daughters, their sisters. I think the reason I got involved in White Ribbon is there are so many people I know who have gone through domestic violence and sexual harassment, and I just wanted to do something to help them and to help my future daughters, my nieces, my goddaughters, my aunties going forward, so they wouldn't have to go through that.

The statistics are disgusting in our community, and I think it should be a responsibility of every male to take a stance against it and to make sure we don't do those horrible things. Because women are more than the people who raise our children, they are fantastic leaders in their own rights in our community, and we want to give them the same safe environment, as we would expect.