

The [imbroglio](#) surrounding AFL legend and 2014 Australian of the Year Adam Goodes has been unedifying, to say the least. Those who boo Goodes when he has the ball invariably claim it has nothing to do with him being Indigenous; rather it is about [what Goodes is doing or has done](#).

Conduct unbecoming?

According to critics, the dual Brownlow medallist, two-time premiership player and Swans games record holder offends because he ‘stages for free kicks’. If so, he can’t be very good at it, having received a [modest tally](#) over the past few seasons. He is also said to tackle dangerously. If so, he ought to have attracted the censure of umpires. In an 18-year career Goodes has been found guilty of three charges of rough conduct and one of striking. He received reprimands for two of them, and a one game suspension for each of the other two. However, according to conspiracy theorists, Goodes has long been a

[‘protected species’](#);

– whether by umpires or the tribunal. He is advantaged by being Adam Goodes, instead of penalised for what he is doing on the field. This is not a new claim. In 2014, Shane Warne – of cricketing fame and sexting shame –

[provoked Goodes via Twitter](#)

, questioning whether he was a “worthy recipient of the Australian of the Year award” in that his “onfield behaviour was not befitting a person with that honour”.

According to many commentators, the perennial booing of Goodes has ‘nothing to do’ with him being Aboriginal. The terms [‘wanker’](#), [‘tosser’](#), [‘pillock’](#) and [‘flog’](#)

indicate their disdain without reference to Goodes’s Aboriginality. This is particularly convenient for people who, under the cover of social media anonymity or in the midst of a crowd, relish screaming abuse. They claim that their target – Adam Goodes – is objectionable for his conduct as a human being, not because he is Indigenous. They typically cite objections to his ‘style of play’, but also a ‘dislike’ of the man himself. What has raised their ire?

Calling out racism

Paradoxically, while social media hecklers invariably deny that their conduct has anything to do with Goodes's Aboriginality, they typically expend plenty of energy complaining that he 'uses' his indigeneity in ways they don't like. One pivotal example illustrates this. In 2013 Goodes alerted stadium security when someone in the MCG crowd called him an ape. He was close to the boundary line and pointed towards the alleged culprit. Goodes did not realise, but the heckler was a 13 year-old girl. Subsequently she was [shabbily treated](#) - detained for the rest of the game in a police holding area and isolated from her guardian. A common refrain from Goodes's critics is that he was responsible for the [shaming of a minor](#). It was his doing.

This is hardly the first time that an AFL spectator has been 'called out' for racism, but the catalyst tends to be [offended fans](#). In 2014 a patron at Etihad Stadium was [ejected and charged by police](#) after racially vilifying both Lance Franklin and Adam Goodes; thankfully neither heard the abuse. Yet players sometimes detect racial verballing. In 2011, [Franklin](#)

complained after he was vilified at a game in Launceston, but was unable to identify the aggressor. A year later, Collingwood's Dale Thomas reported that a Magpie fan had racially abused his Gold Coast opponent,

[Joel Wilkinson](#)

. These and other cases passed without controversy: perpetrators were counselled and in some instances had their membership revoked. It is worth contemplating where the Goodes debate might be today if the fan who referred to him as an 'ape' was an adult, and their treatment by security was appropriate to circumstances. By contrast, two years on, the mother of the girl who was called out for racism has recently insisted that

[Goodes owes her daughter an apology](#)

.

Stepping into the past

During the AFL's Indigenous Round this year, Goodes surprised with a dance move he later explained was [inspired by junior Aboriginal footballers](#). In retrospect, Goodes might have secured public understanding of the innovation if he had forewarned of a special celebration after he kicked a goal. This is because unlike the Maori Haka, Goodes's display was directed at opposition fans, rather than that team's players. While a dramatic sideways dance towards the crowd while holding an imaginary spear was not going to inflict real damage, some of the Carlton fans appeared startled. Goodes later apologised if any of them were offended, but said that because he was depicting an "Aboriginal warrior" and the ceremony was a "war cry" it needed to be parochial. An idealist,

[Go](#)

[odes was surprised](#)

about

[negative reactions to his dance](#)

, lamenting:

“Is this the lesson we want to teach our children that when we don’t understand something we get angry and we put our back up against the wall (and say) ‘Oh that’s offensive?’ No. If it’s something we don’t understand, let’s have a conversation.”

Goodes’s optimism flies in the face of widespread criticism he received while Australian of the Year, a position that [many people did not believe he ‘deserved’](#). To them he was a ‘token’ Aboriginal appointment. His

[acceptance speech](#)

was nonetheless effusive and inclusive: “The ultimate reward is when all Australians see each other as equals and treat each other as equals”. Yet when Goodes spoke up subsequently in defence of racial equality and against racism, alarmists seized. Two examples will suffice.

First, like many other Indigenous people, Goodes is not comfortable with a sanitised version of [Australia \[settlement\] Day](#)

. For many Aboriginal people it is

[Invasion Day; he](#)

preferred

[Survival Day](#)

, thereby looking to a future of co-existence through reconciliation. Second, Goodes attended an open-air screening at Redfern of John Pilger’s film Utopia, a harrowing account of race relations in Australian. Thereafter he wrote with emotion, urging all Australians to watch the film. Hence, though he looked to the future, Goodes concluded that reconciliation would not be possible without coming to terms with

[“our very dark past, a brutal history of dispossession, theft and slaughter”](#)

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To conservative commentators such as [Andrew Bolt](#) , [Miranda Devine](#) and [Alan Jones](#) , this confronting narrative was ‘evidence’ that Goodes was divisive, rather than inclusive. They nevertheless reduced the booing of Goodes at games to him being merely ‘disliked’ –

[nothing to do with his indigeneity](#)

.

[Patrick Smith](#)

disputes this. He points to the absurdity that

Sportsmen have been charged with domestic violence, drug abuse, sexual assault and not been booed anywhere near the level, the length or the regularity of Goodes. The difference? A blackfella with an agenda.

Just get over it

Goodes has recently received plenty of advice. Much of the journalistic and social media commentary revolves around his disappointment at being booed every week. Many people are [sympathetic](#)

. Some are happy to cheer on the hecklers –

[‘free speech’](#);

is at stake, they say. A common refrain is that Goodes should

[‘man up’](#);

and simply ignore the booing. Jason Akermanis, for example, told

[Fox Sports News](#)

that “Goodes has got to stop looking like a sook ... and trying to play the victim”. This advice from someone who once described the Aboriginal owners of a radio station for whom he worked as

[‘monkeys’](#);

. Meanwhile, the Channel 9 Footy Show’s Sam Newman blamed Goodes for the booing, arguing that people at the footy

[‘don’t want to have to put up with political statements of any sort’](#);

– they want escapism. This advice from someone who once

[painted his face black on television](#)

to mimic Nicky Winmar.

Non-indigenous critics invariably insist that Goodes ‘man up’ and simply ‘cop it sweet’. In response, the Aboriginal media identity [Stan Grant](#) has implored people to think deeply about the impact of discourses of derision. Adam Goodes is a man who feels down, even let down. A groundswell of

[indigenous athletes](#)

as [support from other](#), as well

[political leaders](#)

and

[fellow footballers](#)

may provide the

[positive ‘energy’](#);

that Goodes is looking for. His absence from the Swans this week has, if nothing else, sparked a national conversation about civility and respect towards others.

Man up? I see a man down. Booing and being Adam Goodes

Written by The Conversation

Read more <http://theconversation.com/man-up-i-see-a-man-down-booing-and-being-adam-goodes-45536>