



Football, or soccer, is truly a World Game, with an unmatched ability to bring people from different backgrounds together. With attention turning to Brazil for the FIFA World Cup, which starts on 12 June 2014, there is no better time to discover the contributions Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have made to the World Game.

Did you know?

- Harry Williams is the only male Aboriginal player to represent Australia at a World Cup. He joined the Socceroos in 1970 and later played in the 1974 World Cup in Germany.¹
- In 2008, Jade North became the first Aboriginal player to captain the Socceroos. He has a tattoo with his tribal name, “Biripi”, on his left arm and recently played in the 2014 A-league grand final.²
- Lydia Williams and Kyah Simon are the first two Aboriginal women to play together in a World Cup. Lydia played in the 2007 and 2011 World Cups, and Kyah played in 2011.³ In 2011 Kyah became the first Aboriginal Australian to score a goal in a World Cup.
- Charlie Perkins was offered a contract to play soccer for Manchester United before becoming the first Aboriginal person to graduate from the University of Sydney.
- Travis Dodd was the first Aboriginal Australian to score a goal for the Socceroos.⁴

Some quick statistics...

- The Football Federation of Australia (FFA) estimates that there are **2,600** registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander soccer players.⁵
- Harry Williams played **6** matches for Australia in the 1974 World Cup qualifying campaign.⁶



¹ <http://www.deadlyvibe.com.au/2007/11/harry-williams/>

² *The Aboriginal Soccer Tribe: A History of Aboriginal Involvement with the World Game*, John Maynard, Magabala Books: Broome, 2011

³ <http://noapologiesrequired.com/the-matildas/15-facts-about-the-matildas>

⁴ <http://www.footballaustralia.com.au/perthglory/players/Travis-Dodd/72>

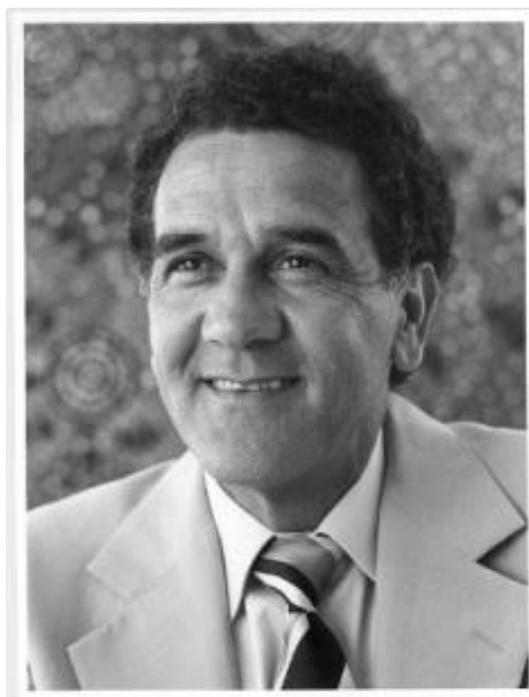
⁵ http://www.footballaustralia.com.au/site/_content/document/00000601-source.pdf

⁶ Tatz, C & Tatz, C. (1996). *Black Diamonds. The Aboriginal and Islander Sports Hall of Fame*. Allen& Unwin: NSW.

- After playing **17** games for South Australia, John Moriarty was the first Aboriginal player to be selected to represent Australia in soccer in 1960.⁷
- [John Moriarty Football](#) is sending **8** young Indigenous boys and girls from Boorooloola in the Northern Territory to the FIFA World Cup Finals, based on school attendance, behaviour and talent with the round ball.⁸

Meet...Charles Perkins

Charles Perkins, commonly known as Charlie, born on 16 June 1936, was an Arrernte and Kalkadoon man. Charlie's exceptional soccer skills led to him becoming a pioneering figure in Aboriginal affairs, leading the way for greater recognition of Indigenous people throughout the twentieth century. Charlie's energetic drive and focused direction facilitated his participation and leadership in the world of soccer, and later saw him lead the movement for recognition of Indigenous people's rights from the 1960s. Playing in England, Adelaide, and Sydney, Charlie's incredible soccer skills shone throughout his playing career.



Charlie was taken from Alice Springs, with permission from his mother, and placed in St Francis boys' home in Adelaide. From there, the young Charlie was recruited into the Port Thistle soccer team in 1951. His speed, power and ferocious shooting skills were recognised while playing in sides throughout Adelaide, culminating in an offer from the English Everton club.⁹ A move to amateur English team Bishop Auckland led to the aspiration of a university education while playing against a side from Oxford University.¹⁰ He was offered a trial with Manchester United but homesickness, and a wish to contribute to the emancipation of his people, brought him home to Australia.

Charlie returned to Australia to be captain coach for Adelaide Croatia, playing with two other Aboriginal players and his close friends, John Moriarty and Gordon Briscoe.¹¹ While vice-captain of the South Australian state team, Charlie met his local MP Don Dunstan, who would go on to become the South Australian Premier.¹² After moving to Sydney, where he used his soccer payments to assist his studies, Charlie was offered a contract to play with Pan Hellenic.¹³

⁷ Tatz, C & Tatz, C. (1996). *Black Diamonds. The Aboriginal and Islander Sports Hall of Fame*. Allen & Unwin: NSW.

⁸ <http://jmf.org.au/jmf-is-off-to-the-fifa-world-cup/>

⁹ ibid

¹⁰ <http://sesasport.com/?p=1591>

¹¹ *The Aboriginal Soccer Tribe: A History of Aboriginal Involvement with the World Game*, John Maynard, Magabala Books: Broome, 2011

¹² <http://ia.anu.edu.au/biography/perkins-charles-nelson-charlie-810>

¹³ <http://sesasport.com/?p=1591>

Charlie retired from playing in 1965, and became a leader in the administration and promotion of soccer and eventually the National League.

Charlie's magnificent career as a player and administrator in the world of soccer was achieved in parallel to his leadership in gaining recognition and rights for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Charlie was the first Aboriginal person to graduate from the University of Sydney, and was determined to change racial attitudes across the country. As an activist he played an integral part in the "[Freedom Rides](#)," protesting against racially discriminatory policies and segregation.¹⁴

In 1969 he began work at the newly formed Department of Aboriginal Affairs which confirmed his belief in the rejection of "top-down" policy development. In 1972 on the Council for Aboriginal Affairs, Charlie questioned the decision making process which excluded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and decried the "white officials [who were] sitting in theoretical judgment".¹⁵ His career advanced to Assistant Secretary in the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in 1972, where he hoped to use his influence to better Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lives.¹⁶ He served as ATSI commissioner in both Alice Springs and Sydney and was awarded the Order of Australia in 1987.¹⁷ Upon his death in 2000 due to kidney disease, Charlie left a strong and lasting legacy of fighting for justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Take action...

- Read John Maynard's "The Aboriginal Soccer Tribe: A History of Aboriginal Involvement with the World Game", Charles Perkins' autobiography "A Bastard Like Me", John Moriarty's "Saltwater Fella", or Gordon Briscoe's "Racial Folly: A Twentieth-Century Aboriginal Family", for an insight into the lives of these early Aboriginal soccer champions and important Australian change-makers.
- Follow and support [John Moriarty Football](#) and the young Indigenous players through their [Facebook page](#), as they experience the World Cup in Brazil.
- Watch the documentary, "[No Apologies](#)" about Lydia Williams and Kyah Simon's journey to the 2011 World Cup in Germany.
- Watch Rachel Perkins' [documentary](#) about her father Charlie and the Freedom Rides of 1965.
- If you are a post graduate Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander student you can apply to the [Charlie Perkins Trust for Children and Students](#) for the opportunity to study overseas.

Reconciliation Australia would like to thank John Maynard, John Moriarty Foundation, Rachel Perkins and Football Federation of Australia.

Photos: Charles Perkins courtesy of National Library of Australia. Mr Charles Perkins / Australian Information Service Call number: PIC Portraits Box P

¹⁴ <http://ia.anu.edu.au/biography/perkins-charles-nelson-charlie-810>

¹⁵ p.160 Charles Perkins: "A Bastard Like Me"

¹⁶ <http://www.perkinstrust.com.au/about-dr-charles-perkins.html>

¹⁷ *ibid*