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## Collingwood's Andrew Krakouer insists there is a lot more to him than his 16-month jail stint



Collingwood's Andrew Krakouer, now a mentor, tells all on Fox Footy's The Club tonight Picture: Wayne Ludbe

### **A JAILBIRD for a dad. A father himself at 16. A high school dropout who knocked around with kids whose parents were incarcerated.**

That Andrew Krakouer has played AFL is remarkable. No matter how gifted a kid is these days, recruiters balk at the hint of trouble, as the precocious West Australian teenager Dayle Gartlett found last year.

Back then, Krakouer's main concern was figuring out how "to put food on the table as a young fella".

Even though his dad Jimmy Krakouer, who was jailed for drug trafficking, had been a North Melbourne legend, a career in the game was only a dream for the Magpie.

"I had my first daughter when I was 16, so I was still a kid having a child, I suppose, and that was quite difficult," Krakouer said.

"That probably put things on the back-burner. The most important thing was trying to provide for my daughter."

Krakouer is set to play a pivotal role for Collingwood in the second half of this season. And he wants to play on next year and beyond. It's an astonishing accomplishment considering the drama of the next decade of his life.

As tough as his teens were, they had nothing on his 20s. Jailed for an assault verging on deadly, cut by Richmond, the search for redemption in football and in life on his release, a new beginning at Collingwood and a knee injury that nearly ended it all. Only a month ago it was reported -- falsely -- that he had abandoned football altogether.

In a feature interview on Fox Footy's The Club tonight, the 30-year-old addresses in detail these matters and his new mentoring role for inmates.

The program starts with Krakouer soaring high for a screamer against Adelaide and then thumping his chest after kicking a freakish goal.

A portrait of him smiling in his father Jimmy's arms, his hair almost as white as his teeth given the flash, with a youthful Tony Lockett in a St Kilda jumper following soon after.

But then comes the first blow in a life that has seen plenty, with his father jailed for 16 years for his part in an amphetamine trafficking scheme.

"Most weekends we would try to go and see him as a family and obviously it was hard times, not the best memories, but we had to do the best in the situation we were in," he said. "As long as we got to see him and be able to have physical contact, to have a hug. For young boys trying to turn into teenagers, to see their father locked up was quite hard but mum did what she could and we had to soldier on, so to speak."

The realisation his partner, Barbara, was pregnant led Krakouer to seek advice.

While Krakouer played 102 games with Richmond, he admits to not delivering on his talent. Early on he did not possess the fitness. Then came the nightmare.

At a nightclub in Fremantle around Christmas in 2006, Krakouer and his brother Tyrone bashed a member of a rival family. He managed nine games the following season for the Tigers while enduring a criminal investigation that saw him jailed for four years.

"If I could, I would take it back in a heartbeat. My last year of footy at Richmond was in disarray. Mentally I was all over the shop," he said.

"The biggest thing that hurt me was seeing the hurt . . . my actions had not only on the victim's family, but my family as well."

Krakouer maintained his fitness while playing football for the jail team. It is that experience that has driven him to visit jails. The Club shows him addressing inmates at Junee prison this year.

"I was saying to the boys, 'The greens you have worn, I've worn. I've been in the same position you are'," he said. "I tell it how it is. I don't fabricate anything and I think that is why they can relate to it and I think that is why this course should be a success."

On his release after 16 months, a starring year with Swan Districts culminating in the club's first WAFL premiership in 20 years led to Collingwood taking a risk on him. Krakouer repaid the faith by playing 23 games in 2011.

Then, early in 2012, his knee popped. But as the Magpie stresses when addressing suggestions he quit football last month after Eddie McGuire's gaffe following the Adam Goodes racial abuse incident, he has travelled too far to throw it away now.

"Obviously I would love to play on next year but I have had an up-and-down, roller-coaster first half to the season," he said.

"If the body is fine and the mind is able, I'd love to go on next year."