

Facility: Junee Correctional Centre
Media: Herald Sun
Published Date: 24 May 2013

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



Andrew Krakouer with daughters Allira and Tekia. Picture: Wayne Ludbey Source: Herald Sun

ANDREW Krakouer understands the football community is fascinated by the 16-month stint he served in a West Australian prison, but he does not accept that it should define him.

"You'd have to have been living under a rock if you didn't know that I did time, that my dad did time," the Collingwood forward says. Paradoxically, though, that experience may help define the path he chooses after football.

Perhaps because Krakouer, 30, has had more time than most to contemplate that path.

He has firm views about what career direction he expects to take when he finally hangs up his footy boots: welfare and youth work. Krakouer already devotes much of his spare time to these areas. Over the years he has completed an AFL traineeship, offered drug and alcohol counselling and been part of a community services program with Perth club Swan Districts.

His latest project is a reform program for indigenous prisoners called It's Your Time, which led him to record a series of videos that discuss the issues inmates might confront on release.

They are matters that he can relate back to his own release from the minimum-security Wooroloo Prison Farm in 2009, having been sentenced for his assault on a man outside a Fremantle nightclub three years earlier.

"They are questions like: How will you go when you get out? How much has society changed? Will you cope with a partner who's a lot more independent and kids who have got used to you not being there? Even how will you go having your independence back? All the little issues like that," Krakouer said.

"When you're in jail you're in another little world because you hear about everything that's going on on the outside. People tell you things but you only get to live it secondhand.



Andrew Krakouer celebrates a goal with Scott Pendlebury. Picture: Colleen Petch Source: Herald Sun

"You just have to deal with that situation."

My way of dealing with it, and it's a footy saying but one that I still believe in, was just to focus on what you can control and not to worry about the things you can't have any influence over.

"That's how I went about it each day in there."

Krakouer has combined with former lawyer and prisoner Graeme Alford to get the reform program up and running. The Junee Correctional Centre, just north of Wagga Wagga, will be the first prison to trial it next month.

"It's all done but it's just a matter of taking it to the institutions in the coming months and hoping they will give it ago," he said.

"Unfortunately there's always going to be people who get in trouble and find themselves in jail. But if I can use my experiences to help them in any kind of way and give them a little bit of hope I'm more than happy enough to put my hand up and do that.

"I want to talk to people about getting through the dark times and dealing with their issues while they're incarcerated. I know myself that I was lucky enough to have a support structure with family and mates, but some inmates don't have as many people to turn to or as much to look forward to.

"It's about them realising that life does go on while you're inside. It's tough when you've got this black mark against your name to put it behind you and get your life going again.

"But it's a matter of believing that there are people out there willing to give you an opportunity. And also that you've got to want to do it yourself as well."

Krakouer, who played 102 games for Richmond from 2001-07, was also fortunate that he could turn to football during his time at Wooroloo, saying it helped to distract him and give him a focus.



Andrew Krakouer runs out with Wooroloo in 2009. *Source:* Northern Territory News

He was the star player in the Wooroloo Bombers prison team that played in the Mercantile Football Association in the 2009 season as part of the New Horizons program.

"We did a lot of training together and supported each other and tried to make it as much fun as we could given the situation we were in," Krakouer said.

"When you're fit you feel better about yourself, instead of just sitting there in a cell and not doing much, worrying about too many things and making life tougher than it needs to be.

"Basically it was all geared up to playing on the Sunday and getting to spend some time with your family in a nice environment, rather than sitting in a cold hard room with a table in between you.

"The boys all knew it was a privilege and they had to behave otherwise it would be taken away from you pretty quickly.

"There wasn't much competition. We used to win every game by 15 goals, but we didn't care because just getting to see your family was the best part of the week." Krakouer said the team was "five or six goals down in the grand final and had to pull our finger out" to win the 2009 premiership (by 40 points), completing an undefeated season.

Asked whether he imagined those matches might lead to a return to elite football, Krakouer replied:

"Playing AFL never entered my mind while I was there.

"It was the furthest thing from where I was at. My whole life revolved around the next time I would see my partner (Barbara) and my family (daughters Allira and Tekia)." Krakouer was reminded of his season with the Bombers just last month, when he took a phone call from the ABC asking whether he would be interested in narrating a television documentary about the team's 2012 season in the WA Australian Amateur Football League.



Andrew Krakouer gesturing during a game with Collingwood in 2011, acknowledging his time in prison and inmates. Picture: Colleen Petch Source: Herald Sun

"They approached me about doing it and I thought I might as well have a crack," he said.

"I went up to Brisbane and they gave me a script for a voice-over. I had a bit of the footage to work with, but it was a little bit tough at times.

"It covers the entire season they had last year, so they've put it over five episodes. The pre-season, a few of their games, some of the issues they had to deal with while they were inside and playing footy.

"How they have to be on their best behaviour because everyone's watching them and the program does raise a few eyebrows.

"The (Collingwood) boys said 'Do you know anything about this stuff?' I said, 'What? Narrating? Yeah, move over Morgan Freeman and David Attenborough'." It was a stark reminder of how far Krakouer has come in the 3 1/2 years since he was playing for Wooroloo.

In the meantime he has dominated a WAFL season, played in an AFL Grand Final, taken mark of the year and undergone and returned from a knee reconstruction.

Off the field, he is one of about 20 AFL players - including teammate Nathan Brown - who is completing a Certificate IV in Business through the AFL SportsReady program, "just to see what's involved in running a small business".

Krakouer heads up Collingwood's Barrawarn program, a three-year scheme aiming to provide young indigenous people with education and employment, including five traineeships with AFL Victoria.

"I guess it's about being an ambassador as well as a mentor for some of the young kids," he said.



Andrew Krakouer at Collingwood training. *Source: Herald Sun*

"I help them through, make sure they're comfortable and being there if they need to talk to anyone. "I would say that helping youth is where I see myself headed.

"I was talking to (Collingwood sports science director) David Buttifant about this the other day. He said 'invest in youth as much as you can because they're the next generation coming through and you can share your experiences and help them make better decisions'.

"If you can help even one kid choose the right path then it's been a worthwhile exercise."

If there is one topic Andrew Krakouer is qualified to discuss, it is understanding the consequences of the right and wrong path.

TOP FORM WORTH THE WEIGHT

THE PRE-SEASON criticism about being out of shape was not lost on Andrew Krakouer.

"I had a few little niggles in the pre-season. My knee was a little sore and a few other bits and pieces and I wasn't able to train as hard as I wanted to," he said. "And sure, I was carrying a little bit, but people are so quick to judge and they forget that it's a long season.

"Look, I understand that from where they're coming from they expect AFL footballers to be in absolutely top nick all of the time, but they've got to understand that from time to time things come up that stop that from happening.

"There are hurdles along the way and you've got to just get over them. That's all that was, the body being a little underdone, but now I'm fully fit and ready to get on with the rest of the season, starting with the Swans this week."

He is coming off an scintillating display against Geelong, in which he had 19 disposals including three goals. That might have been four had a torpedo punt on the run hit its target from 60m.

"I kick torps all the time at training, but I probably got a little bit excited with that one ... although I did get on to it. She went the distance, just didn't get straight. "The next time the ball came inside 50 I was determined to have a shot, but when it happened I have to give off the Joe the Goose to Travy over the top.

"When you're injured you can't get out on the park and show your wares. So at the moment I'm really enjoying my footy. It's a great environment for us to thrive in, a great bunch of boys and the coaches."

MAGPIES FRIENDLY FIRE

ANDREW Krakouer could only chuckle and shake his head in disbelief.

During the first quarter of last Saturday's match against Geelong, he was tackled to the ground by teammate Quinten Lynch. "I said, 'Q, mate, you've cost me a goal. What were you doing man?' He said, 'I dunno, just a brain fade'.

Krakouer grinned: "So I told him, 'Yeah, well, don't let it happen again'.

"It came up in the review and the boys had a bit of a laugh and thought it was pretty funny, and so did I.

"Bucks wasn't too bad about it. He was just happy with his defensive pressure. Too bad he (Lynch) got the wrong jumper, but his effort was there."

Asked whether Lynch could have become confused by the similarity of the two jumpers, Krakouer laughed: "Nah mate, nothing alike. I don't know what he was doing." And for those wondering, no, Lynch's tackle did not count in the official Champion Data statistics.