



Richo

Martin Flanagan, Matthew Richardson

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What happens when you put together the AFL's best-loved player and the game's best-loved writer?

Matthew Richardson, known as Richo, retired in 2009 as the most popular player in the AFL. Why was that? The careers of other great players like Nathan Buckley and Michael Voss amount to a sort of sporting perfection. Richo's career didn't. He was fallible. His kicking was flawed and he had an inability to hide his feelings on the ground but in other respects he was extraordinarily gifted. He was one of the best marks in the competition and it is said he could have run for Australia.

His father, Alan "Bull" Richardson, played in Richmond's 1967 premiership team, a pivotal result in the history of the club. On his mother's side, he is descended from a black American sailor who arrived in Sydney in 1840. The average AFL career lasts three years. Richo's lasted 17 seasons. In that time, the general public got to appreciate his great bravery and his passion for both the game and his club. They also learned that, off the field, he was a humble, polite man who was always last on to the team bus because he was signing autographs.

"Richo", the book, is essentially an account of the last two years of his football life with flashbacks that trace the outline of his long career. In the process, the author, Martin Flanagan, discovers a man who is worldly and much-travelled, who has a deep love of music and who thinks and uses words in a novel way. Richo is an Australian original.

The book climaxes with the 2008 season when Richo, in what was seen as a prelude to his delisting, was taken from the key forward position he had dominated for nearly two decades and put on a wing. At age 33, he responded by almost winning the Brownlow medal.

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