

OPINION

## Eddie still doesn't get it: Pies can't rebuild from a position of denial

By Barrie Cassidy  
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*Eddie McGuire fronts a press conference after the release of a report into racism at Collingwood.*

It's the spin that gets them every time. And Eddie McGuire in full flight would make even a politician blush.

When the Collingwood president fronted Monday's news conference, overwhelmingly the media expected him to face up to the core conclusion of the review: that systemic racism existed at the club, and though it existed elsewhere, there was something "distinct and egregious" about Collingwood's history.

He needed as a bottom line to properly acknowledge the hurt and damage that had been done. Own the problem. Only then can positive changes have any impact.

But instead it was classic spin. The face was too brave. He described the release of the internal report as a proud day for the club because, according to his logic, it was somehow noble of the club to call for it in the first place.

It was spin over substance, rhetoric over action, a ridiculously ill-conceived attempt to reframe the debate through deception.

Had the club faced up to the conclusions in the review, as damning as they were, the discussion would have moved on to the resolve to do better and to the long list of recommended solutions.

Instead the tactic fitted precisely what the review had accused the club of in the past; it was damage control to protect the brand rather than a genuine effort to address the fundamental problem.

I am personally sick of the awful history that the club has built for itself around racism, going all the way back to booing the Indigenous greats such as Syd Jackson, Michael Long, Robert Muir and most famously Nicky Winmar.



*Nicky Winmar, a Noongar man, famously lifted his guernsey and pointed at his skin in a 1993 match against Collingwood.*

I once went to Marvel Stadium as a guest of one of Collingwood's inner sanctum group only to be astonished to hear a member hurling racial abuse at a Western Bulldogs player in front of everybody. When I took him on, he said he paid big money for his special seat and he could say whatever he liked.

At least the club in 2021 has committed to implementing all of the review's recommendations. Surely they will. That's commendable and sensible. That includes a process of "truth-telling" around Indigenous issues. That concept is genuinely a spin-free zone.

The chief executive Mark Anderson joined the club at just the right time to take up the challenge. The integrity committee, with Peter Murphy and the club's first Indigenous board member, Jodie Sizer, as a part of it, has undoubtedly hit the ground running.

But how convincing will their work be while McGuire stays on as president?

McGuire rightly pointed out that challenges at any club go beyond racism to multiculturalism and gender. So true. But look at his history. On casual racism: suggesting Adam Goodes could be used to promote the musical *King Kong*. Just banter, he said.

Neither can he airbrush away those many years on *The Footy Show*, the instances of blackface, the misogyny, that others perpetrated but he as host all too casually waved away.

So having led the club down this path, is he now the right person to lead them out of it? If the crisis was one of management, resources or finances, then yes. But not when the issue is racism. The rap sheet is too long.

When it was put to him that all this had happened under his watch, he said: "We've built a fantastic club." You can't start the rebuild from a position of denial.

It was anything but a proud day for Collingwood, Eddie

There is no systematic racism, he insists. "We just didn't have the processes to deal with it." That is the very definition of a systemic problem.

"In our netball team," he said, "we have Asian people coming through."

As McGuire himself said rather awkwardly at the news conference: "Sometimes you don't get it until you actually get it." The evidence suggests he still doesn't get it.

There is a difference anyway between diversity and inclusion. You can bring different cultures to the club, but without true inclusion, there will be no cultural safety and equality.

The men's team list doesn't have an Indigenous player. They have had some in the past, but sadly the club failed to provide an inclusive and culturally safe environment. The Heritier Lumumba saga is not only a case in point, but a case that has been allowed to drag on for eight years without a resolution.

The review pointedly said “there is a culture of individuals, if not quite bigger than the club, then at least having an unhealthy degree of influence over the club’s culture”. That can only be a reference to McGuire. Nobody else comes close.

The historical problem is that virtually for 20 years the club has not had an election for the board. McGuire and presumably the board decide for themselves who they need, and they appoint them.

That has meant a succession of board members who owed their places to McGuire. Is that why after all his casual references to racism, he was never called to account? If he was, that was never communicated to the membership. And so it was repeated.

Just as the self-indulgent constant fights and conflicts were allowed to go on. It’s time for a bit of democracy.

And it’s time to stop the hyperbole. Collingwood doesn’t have to be top of the ladder on these issues, as McGuire constantly references.

For now it would be good if Collingwood could just get off the bottom of the racism ladder; and incrementally start to take the steps that will eventually rebuild the club’s shattered reputation.

**Barrie Cassidy is former host of ABC’s *Insiders* program and a Collingwood supporter.**