

‘Angry and frustrated’: Burgoyne breaks silence on Rioli



Premiership teammates Shaun Burgoyne and Cyril Rioli.

By Andrew Wu and Jake Niall
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Hawthorn great Shaun Burgoyne says the club had erred in their handling of a racial incident at a 2013 end-of-season trip, as the Hawks seek input from current and past players and officials and the AFL about the treatment of Indigenous players highlighted by former champion Cyril Rioli before deciding on what action is taken.

Burgoyne, a Kokatha-Warai man who played in three premierships for the Hawks, spoke for the first time on the matter on Thursday night, saying he was not aware an Indigenous teammate had been racially vilified on the trip to Bali.

A then senior player asked whether an Indigenous teammate’s wife was “also a boong” - an episode that former skipper Luke Hodge has addressed, saying that it was resolved between two senior players and the Indigenous teammate and did not reach the leadership group.

Burgoyne, who was not on the trip, was unhappy with how the issue was addressed.

“I had no knowledge of an incident and no knowledge until I read it actually in the paper, which makes me a little bit angry and a bit frustrated because if I would’ve known, something would’ve been done about it then and there,” Burgoyne said on Seven.

“But I didn’t and I found out this week, which was very surprising.

“I think it was a footy trip in Bali, so I didn’t go on it, I wasn’t there. I’m not too sure of the actual details on it.

“It was offshore which is still no excuse. The players talked through it and they seemed to have settled it then and there, but things of that magnitude and that importance needs to come back to the club and be dealt with in the right way.

“The players involved are probably learning that now.”

Burgoyne said though he was not aware of Rioli’s concerns when they were teammates his reflections on his time at the club should be respected.

“I didn’t realise he felt that way at the time,” he said. “Obviously he doesn’t say much, Cyril, but these are his feelings and his words, and his wife’s feelings and words, which has to be respected.

“At the time, no, I didn’t really know he felt that way to that extent.

“I’ve rung him and left a couple of messages, no return yet, but at some stage we’ll have a chat.”

Burgoyne also said he could not have been happier in his 12 seasons at the Hawks, where he became one of the most respected players in the game.

“That’s my own personal opinion, everyone is entitled to their own,” Burgoyne said. “Cyril has his, which has been in the media this week, but my situation and my enjoyment levels was completely different to his.

“I still think Cyril enjoyed his time at Hawthorn as well. He played a lot of games, premierships, Norm Smiths and the likes, but he wanted certain things dealt with. The cub internally are dealing with things now.”

The Hawks say that the club is still gathering information from “Hawthorn people” and trying to get a fuller picture of whether there are any other incidents or events that have offended Indigenous players, in addition to those mentioned by Rioli and his wife Shannyn, before working out their next step.

The Hawks have not yet committed to any formal investigation or inquiry. They say that, at this stage, they need more information about what might have happened at the club.

They have not yet decided what level of inquiry is required, and whether an independent party is needed to look into any alleged mistreatment of Indigenous players at Hawthorn. Rioli and his wife told *The Age* about incidents that have soured their relationship with the club, which Rioli says would be the last club he would deal with as a result of his experiences.

Hawthorn chief executive Justin Reeves told *The Age* that the club was “very much in the listening phase” rather than committed to a course of action, having also spoken to the AFL about the Rioli situation. He said the club needed to gather more information. President Jeff Kennett, whose comments about ripped designer jeans offended Shannyn Ah-Sam Rioli, wrote to club members on Wednesday, saying they were “conducting further inquiries to see if there have been other incidents affecting our past First Nations players.”

Hawthorn coach Sam Mitchell said on Thursday that “it’s possible” he may be asked to take part in the club’s inquiries into any other potential racial incidents affecting First Nations players.

“I think Jeff always writes his letters to members and tries to be as transparent as you can be,” Mitchell said.

“And I think it’s really important that we do find answers and I’ve been part of that, but really my role at the moment is to lead the current group and to make sure that the players, along with Rob McCartney and the rest of the football department, are aligned and strong in the future and I’ll let the board and the administration work out the off-field stuff.”

Car giant Nissan has indicated it is standing by the Hawks, a source familiar with the issue has said, having in February signed a five-year extension to a sponsorship deal.