

STAND STRONG

By Peter Argent



The Motlop name is pretty big at the Bay.

Marlon Motlop has etched himself into the club's history as its first Indigenous league premiership player. And he is a second Motlop Tiger, his uncle Mark desperately unlucky not to be the club's first Indigenous premiership winner back in 1985.

Marlon is a proud Larrakia man, while he also has Kungarakany through mum Paulina's side of the family, as well as having Torres Strait Islander heritage.

He was a key member of the 2019 title-winning Bays side, kicking three goals in the club's stunning grand final triumph over Port Adelaide at Adelaide Oval for its long-awaited fifth premiership win.

Motlop arrived at the Bay for the 2018 campaign after having already achieved plenty in footy across much of Australia in four major competitions. He had been considering continuing his career in community footy but the inspired decision to don the Glenelg jumper like his Uncle Mark had 35 years before him, proved fruitful for both parties.

Before coming to the Bay, Marlon had a full, diverse and successful career, playing State league representative football in WA and SA, while lining up with the current generation of the family's club, the Wanderers Muk Muk Eagles in Darwin's NTFL Premier League.

After five AFL games with Port Adelaide Power, across a four-year stint at Alberton (2008-11), when he played his SANFL football for North Adelaide and, for a brief time, West Adelaide, Motlop travelled across the Nullarbor to the WAFL.

There were three club best-and-fairest accolades in four years – with Swan Districts in 2012, Peel Thunder in 2013 and the Barrie Robran Medal for North's club champion in '15 when he returned to the City of Churches. He became one of a rare group to don the gold jumper with the black swan as a WAFL State player and also proudly wear the red, blue and gold of the Croweaters, against the WAFL.

A natural leader, Motlop was a member of Glenelg's 2018 and '19 leadership groups and was vice-captain in 2020 alongside skipper Max Proud.

On-field he was a history-maker and difference-maker at the Bay. Off the field, even more so. Motlop has been at the forefront of driving Indigenous initiatives in the SANFL and within the club, his influence at the Bay starting by helping design the Tigers' hugely-popular and inspirational Indigenous jumper worn from 2018-2021.

His leadership and ability to bring people together was never more evident than during the Robbie Young racial vilification saga, when Adelaide Crow Taylor Walker made a racist comment about Indigenous North Adelaide premiership player Young at a SANFL game.

Motlop was instrumental in an initiative of support and unification as all SANFL league players, coaches and umpires joined together in a display of unity against racism before the start of Round 17 matches, coming together around the centre circle and linking arms for a one-minute reflection.

"There was a collective buy-in by each club and their leaders," Motlop said. "Importantly, the parent body, the SANFL, committed to the cause as well."



Far Left: Marlon Motlop in 2021 took a stand against racism when he came up with the idea of every player from every team, along with the umpires, linking up and being united for the good of all, Glenelg and Central showing the way before their clash at the Bay.

Musical talents Marlon Motlop and Rulla Kelly-Mansell added to the diverse entertainment at a gala Centenary Dinner at the Grand in 2021. Kelly-Mansell, who made his league debut in 2019, showed his strength, drive and resilience after in 2020 being diagnosed with a rare and aggressive type of testicular cancer by returning to footy after nine weeks of intense chemotherapy.

“Initially this SANFL anti-racism stance was to express our deep support for Robbie Young. But it also was for all the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander players and officials of the Adelaide Football Club and any First Nations people affected by the recent event of racial vilification.”

Motlop’s stance was universally applauded. On the field, he’s always inspired cheering. The genesis of the Tigers’ all-conquering 2019 season came with Glenelg’s six successive wins to end the 2018 campaign on a high. In the last-gasp Round 19 win over regning premier Sturt at the Bay, Motlop snapped a matchwinning goal that will be embedded in the memories of Glenelg supporters at the ground, as will be his freakish goal in the grand final 12 months later.

There was genuine sadness when Motlop hung up his boots after Glenelg’s 2021 centenary season. But there was never any doubt he had plenty to go on with. A man of many parts, guitarist Motlop’s career as a musician had developed quickly over the previous couple of years, after starting around family events in Darwin in his youth.

Marlon performed on the international stage at WOMADelaide Festival, Bass In the Grass Festival and at the AFL’s 2021 Sir Doug Nicholls Round clash between Port and Fremantle in front of 30,000 fans.

Motlop released three tracks in 2021 and featured on Aussie Hip Hop royalty Urthboy’s Jangle Bells with a collaboration track, *Balmy Christmas Eve*. He has collaborated successfully with fellow First Nation artist Rulla Kelly-Mansell, who played league football with Glenelg in 2019 and is also a remarkable role model. Tasmanian Aboriginal of the Year for 2020, Kelly-Mansell is a cancer survivor and charity founder, along with being a

talented musician. These two Tigers have opened for Midnight Oil, were honoured to sing *Treaty* with Yothu Yindi and helped make Glenelg’s centenary dinner at The Grand a truly grand occasion.

Motlop said his love of music was fostered through his father Maurice, known among the extended family as ‘Mo’, who studied classical guitar as a part of a university degree in Darwin.

“I had a guitar in my hand as early in my life as I had a footy,” Motlop recalled. “At any extended family barbeques a guitar would always come out.

“I was in touch with a number of genres during those early years. We’d listen to rhythm and blues music, plenty of soul and I remember going to sleep in my youth listening to Pavarotti. Other early influences around these family events included Elvis and BB King. It was certainly a diverse grounding.”

Motlop started performing in front of crowds in 2004. “I would go to ‘Open Mike’ nights in Adelaide to refine my craft,” he said.

And there’s more to his connection with country and the arts. Motlop is farm manager of the Indigenous food producer *The Native Co* on the edge of the Barossa Valley. It was formed by his cousin, fellow AFL footballer Daniel Motlop, Damien Manno and Josef Capobianco.

“Their dream, after identifying a gap in the market, was to fill that space, not just to supply seasonal produce but deliver a consistent supply of Australian First Nations produce all year around,” Marlon explained. “I believe working with these First foods gives you that sense of being on country, so I’m pretty excited about investing some time into making this work.



Top Left: Mark Motlop and those unforgettable gold shorts.

Top Right: Marlon Motlop snaps the goal that sinks back-to-back premier Sturt to end the 2018 season, setting the Bays on their way for their '19 premiership assault.

Right: Mark Motlop played 43 games and kicked 26 goals for the Bays between 1983-85.

Far Left: A nice moment and a shake of the hand for Mark Motlop and Tigers coach Graham Campbell.

“Every product grown has a significant story and the place of origin. These have a deep connection not only to Australian Country but the First Nation countries within our nation.”

There was a bitter-sweet taste in the mouth of the first Motlop to don the gold sash. But Mark’s experience has been sweetened a little by his nephew’s premiership success.

Inaugural NTFL Hall of Famer and Top End legend Mark Motlop was at the Bays between 1983-85, playing 43 senior games and kicking 26 goals.

He had endured a pair of knee reconstructions by the age of 21, displayed the tenacity to fight back and play WAFL and SANFL league football, along with winning all nine NTFL representative games when he wore the black, white and ochre NT jumper. He was a member of the Northern Territory 1988 Bicentennial Championship win in Adelaide and represented the NT at State level in rugby league the same year.

“After doing both knees I came to Perth just after New Year and got super fit,” Motlop recalled. “I forced my way into the South Fremantle league team for the final three games that season. After two years in the WAFL, I came to Adelaide and had a couple of seasons with Glenelg.”

His stay ended in crushing disappointment, being dropped for 1985 grand final, only informed by coach Graham Cornes at the Friday night team meeting before the game.

“Naturally at the time I was very frustrated but I still have many friends I catch up with in Adelaide from my time at the Bays,” Motlop said. “Before that Friday night meeting I wasn’t given any indication this might happen. What hurt most was my parents had driven down from Darwin for the game.”

Mark coached Southern Districts to a flag in 1997-98, while youngest brother Paul, who played league footy with Norwood, coached Wanderers to the 2010-11 NTFL Premier League title.