

# **FAIR GAME - SYNOPSIS**

## **Short Synopsis**

FAIR GAME portrays the life of controversial football player, Heritier Lumumba, whose journey to understand his black identity collides with an AFL confronting its own racial issues. Through exclusive access, FAIR GAME uncovers the personal and professional life of an extraordinary Australian - a man who at the top of his game dares to hold a mirror to a nation that doesn't like what it sees.

## **Long Synopsis**

FAIR GAME portrays the life of controversial football player, Heritier Lumumba, whose journey to understand his black identity collides with an AFL confronting its own racial issues.

At age 2, Heritier Lumumba moves to Australia from Rio, Brazil towards the end of a brutal 21-year military dictatorship. At age 9 his surname is changed to his Anglo step-father's while at school he's convinced to shorten his first name - Harry O'Brien embraces his Australian identity.

Lumumba moves to Perth where being black draws racist taunts from kids in the neighbourhood and unwelcome looks when he walks with his white half-sister through the shopping mall.

Lumumba's mum, Elizabeth, and step-father, Ralph, support his early interest in playing Aussie Rules football, seeing it's positive effect on his self-esteem. Lumumba quickly excels finding inspiration from the game's indigenous players, some of the few people-of-colour he sees on television.

Drafted in 2004 by the AFL's most celebrated and equally reviled club, Collingwood, Lumumba skyrockets to the heights of sport celebrity. The media are glad to see something new in this "Boy from Brazil."

At age 21, Lumumba's appetite to understand his identity as a black man has only increased. Following an eye-opening trip to his father's homeland in the Democratic Republic of Congo, he returns to Australia with a stronger understanding of the systemic oppression of his people globally.

When the AFL appoint him their first Multicultural Ambassador to promote a more inclusive public image, Lumumba is willing to play his part.

But Lumumba treads lightly. His club president is media supremo Eddie McGuire. At this time McGuire is known for hosting the highly rated AFL Footy Show, critiqued to this day for its sexist and racist commentary. Lumumba refuses an invitation to appear on the show.

Instead, he becomes Australia's first sport star to embrace Twitter – tweeting about politically controversial issues including asylum seekers. With a social media following 65,000 strong, Lumumba receives an invitation to speak at a UN conference on global health, is appointed a People of Australia

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Ambassador by Prime Minister Gillard and is invited to meet personally with the Dalai Lama.

Despite Lumumba's concern the club might feel he's unfocused, he continues to excel achieving the AFL's coveted All-Australian status and kicking a goal to clinch his club's first Grand Final win in 20 years. But with the tragic suicide of his step-father Ralph, the dramatic resignation of his mentor and legendary coach, Mick Malthouse, and the daily compounding of micro-aggressions experienced by people-of-colour in predominately white cultures, Lumumba spirals into depression.

Ready to quit football, Lumumba returns to Rio to seek guidance and perspective from family and friends who understand him best. There he connects with the African roots he was separated from and feels was suppressed while in Australia.

The importance of standing up for himself and his people is reinforced in Rio and Lumumba vows to return to football with a new focus. He feels compelled to face the racial slights, snubs and insults that, when unanswered, consume energy he would rather spend on the footy field.

The next season, 2013, is fast becoming the best year of his football career. But when club president, Eddie McGuire, makes a racist "gaffe" on radio Lumumba is unable to hold back. What follows is a media storm that questions the criticism of the highly popular McGuire and paints Lumumba as somehow less than a perfect model of manhood.

Lumumba is ridiculed by some in the football community and at one point mocked by new coach and former star player, Nathan Buckley. Feeling ostracised and insulted, Lumumba walks from the club – his resulting absence on the field attracting widespread criticism. He is labelled "precious" by the media, and personifies a PC culture many claim is hurting "Australia's game."

After reconciling with his new coach, Lumumba returns to Collingwood in hopes of rebuilding his relationship with a club he has called home for 10 years.

A year later, Lumumba is traded to another club.

On his last day as a Collingwood player he is given a best-and-fairest trophy for his continued strong performance on the field. He uses his speech to declare the importance of reclaiming his birth name and thanks Collingwood for teaching him which side of history he stands on. The speech is received by a perplexed crowd – they no longer seem to recognise the Harry they had grown to love.

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