



**Media release**

**Wednesday 22 November 2006**

**First ever Indigenous Australian team selected to take on Australia's world champion national touch team in Brisbane on Saturday**

In a sports first, a national Indigenous touch football team will take on the Australian national open touch football team, who are the current world champions, in Brisbane this weekend.

Billed the "Battle of the Nations" the clash between the Australian and national Indigenous teams will headline this year's Indigenous Sports and Cultural Festival program which runs all this weekend at the home of touch football in Brisbane - Whites Hill Sports Complex, on Boundary Road in Coorparoo.

Festival organiser and prominent Indigenous community leader, First Contact chairman Robbie Williams, said it will be the first time an Indigenous national side has ever been chosen - or to take the field - in the sport.

"It's a huge honour for the team and the Indigenous community around Australia and a huge step for this sport."

While ranked an exhibition game, the standard and intensity of the competition is expected to be "test" match quality.

"The game will be a real test for the Australian team, who fly out to South Africa in January to defend the World Cup they won undefeated in Japan in 2003," Mr Williams said.

The national Indigenous side will feature three players who will form part of the national squad to go to South Africa next year, Peter Stoddart, Phil Gyemore and Bo De la Cruz, and other exciting 2005 Youth World Cup representatives Rick Morris and Katie Shaw.

In another first for the festival, which is widely recognised as the most successful fully Indigenous run sports and cultural event in Australia, Indigenous musicians Vic Simms and Adam James will sing the Australian national anthem before the game.

While a host of federal and state ministers and MPs, including Queensland Sports Minister Andrew Fraser, Community Services Minister Warren Pitt, Police Minister Judy Spence, and Federal Indigenous Affairs Minister Mal Brough will join NRL legend Artie Beetson to present the Indigenous players with their Australian jerseys, and player presentations after the games.

In another first, the carnival will host international competition for the first time as a NZ Maori side take on Papua New Guinea, in the "Challenge of the Nations," as the lead up game to the main event.

And in a third major event of the day, the Queensland Indigenous touch team and New South Wales play off for the bragging rights as Australia's top state at 6.30 on Saturday night in the "Battle of the States"

Now in its 13<sup>th</sup> year, this \$250,000 event is widely recognised as a premier event on the Indigenous sports and cultural events calendar. More than 10,000 people, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, attend the carnival each year.

This year, a record 2000 players, from 117 teams will play off for \$30,000 in prizes - and the honour of becoming the top team and State in the world of Indigenous touch football, over the whole weekend.

The carnival draws some of the top players from the National Rugby League such as Benji Marshall, Justin Hodges, Nathan Blacklock, champion boxer Anthony Mundine and women's national touch star Bo de la Cruz who will play during the tournament.

As well as a thriving example of Reconciliation and multi-cultural diversity, the carnival is a proven 10-year-plus case study in success by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in setting up; managing, marketing and running large scale events.

All done by a small local Brisbane Murri community organization, in Mt Gravatt.

"It is an initiative from our community, which has given a multi million dollar – and growing - economic boost to the wider local economy, for more than a decade," Mr Williams said

"The economic impact has more than tripled since the carnival's inception.

As has the reputation of the high standard of competition in both Indigenous and mainstream touch football circles - along with growing community and public support for the whole event - each year.

Mr Williams said the carnival hopes to secure a major sponsorship deal with an Australian based multi-national company for next year's event.

"We are also seeking formal accreditation of the carnival with the Australian Touch Association," Mr Williams said.

"This will be an important step toward securing the future for this sport - and the opportunities this carnival has established - for the Indigenous community not just here in Brisbane but all around the country.

"We believe it will guarantee a strong flow of many more international class Indigenous players who can press for places in the Australian national touch teams, to go on and represent their country," he said.

The Indigenous Sports and Cultural Festival is open and free to the public, alcohol free and provides free supervised rides for children, with non-Indigenous people welcome and attending in growing numbers each year.

For information on the extensive cultural program see First Contact's website: [www.firstcontact.asn.au](http://www.firstcontact.asn.au)

*R.N. Williams*

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