

# CHOPPA CHAT

Edition 3 – 2017

For the third edition of “Choppa Chat” I finally caught up with ex AFL and reigning Berwick Best and Fairest winner, Ash Smith. We caught up on Tuesday night before training to discuss his time as AFL player, tattoos and nicknames. Here’s our chat;

**TA: Hello Gaz, now this isn’t an AFL interview so you can give a bit more than just the stock standard answers you’re used to giving.**

AS: I’ll try my best but I have 6 years of media training ingrained in me, where I’m instructed to give nothing.

**TA: Fair enough, can you start with the story behind the “Gaz” nickname?**

AS: Yeah well back school we used to call each other “Gaz” which was short for “Gary Gay C\*\*t”. Then when I got drafted to West Coast I started calling Nic Natinui, “Gaz”. But with Nic Nat being a pretty popular guy he turned it around on me and got everyone to start calling me “Gaz”. It then progressed to “Gary Glitter” and “Gary the Fiddler” and not surprisingly I got stuck with it.

**TA: Good work Nic Nat. Staying on that topic, you came up through the junior ranks at Berwick, were drafted to the eagles at pick 36 in the 08’ draft via the dandy stingrays. What is like to be moving over to Western Australia at such a young age?**

AS: It was definitely difficult at the start as I was hoping to stay in Melbourne. But when I got over there I was set up with a host family that were great. They looked after me while also giving me my own space and they became like a second family, they made it a lot easier. I also had a girlfriend at the time and we tried the long distance thing for 2 years and that made it difficult as well. Especially when I wasn’t getting a game it was tough but it got better when I started playing a few AFL games.

**TA: How was life in Perth? Would you get recognised walking down the street?**

AS: Perth was good but obviously it is a small town and there is only two teams so you would get recognised down the street getting a coffee. Also I would go out most weekends and I wasn’t a big dog like Nic Nat or Lecca (Mark Lecras) and there would be 18-19 year olds coming up and wanting to get photos with me. Interestingly if had been a similar sort of player in Melbourne I probably wouldn’t get recognised so Perth is pretty intense in that sense.

**TA: Describe the average week for an AFL footballer? Schedule?**

AS: It all depended on what day you played but you would generally get one day off a week. Usually Tuesday or Wednesday. If you played Saturday, Sunday would be recovery, you would then come in for some screening on Monday, to check your body, then a weights session and a light skills session. Either Tuesday or Wednesday would be a semi main session. Then the main session would be two or three days out before a game. Then there is a heap of meetings throughout the week.

**TA: What sort of hours would you be putting in at the footy club?**

AS: It would be like 9 to 3-4ish. You aren’t always doing something because there is different weights groups. You definitely have time to go down the street for an hour, hour and a half coffee. We also played a lot of pool and table tennis, I got pretty good at both of those at one stage. We also had PlayStation’s at the club so we would have Fifa tournaments. So you aren’t always doing something but you were at the club most of the day.

**TA: Who have been your mentors in footy?**

AS: To start with I struggled a little bit with the intensity of training, I don’t think I was lazy I just wasn’t used to the intensity. So Adam Selwood pulled me aside in my first year and said just follow me around for a weeks and that got me up to scratch. The coaches definitely noticed the improvement. In regards to footy, Shannon Hurn played a similar position to me and he was very knowledgeable, he helped me a lot with positioning out on the ground.

**TA: You played 6 seasons, 45 games at the eagles. How did it end?**

AS: Well I saw it coming from a mile away. You always have someone giving you feedback so I knew where I was at. In my last season I wasn't playing that well and I was getting picked as a travelling emergency. So I would travel to Melbourne but not play. So I didn't even have the chance to prove myself at WAFL level. I felt a bit used in that sense and I kind of saw the writing on the wall.

**TA: Any regrets?**

AS: Well it's obviously not a nice thing to hear that you are no longer good enough to play at the level. But I was kind of prepared for it and after a couple of weeks I was pretty excited to start the next chapter of my life. Move back to Melbourne with family and friends, play some local footy so had some things to be excited about.

**TA: Have you had any contact with the eagles or the AFL since you were delisted?**

AS: No not really and that is how the AFL system works. Unless you're a superstar you don't generally hear from them. It may be different because it's an interstate club. But I've barely heard from anyone from the football department, no texts or anything but still keep in contact with a few of the players.

**TA: I ask because I watched the program on ABC a couple of weeks ago about professional sports people adapting back into normal life. Do you feel the AFL should do more for ex players?**

AS: Yeah well there is no doubt they could do more. I don't expect them to go to the end of the earth but just a little bit of support would be good. I had a meeting with the AFLPA and they definitely have some resources to help. But in a way I was probably a bit stupid because I didn't really do anything else while I was playing. I did ¾ of a PT course and I tried to train my wife and after that I realised it wasn't for me.

**TA: Ok so what do you do for a job now?**

AS: I'm a concreter and I kind of just fell into that through my best mate, Bill's father in law. We had an agreement that I would just do a few weeks with him until I sorted myself out but I enjoyed the work, being outside, couple of mates work there as well so I've stuck at it.

**TA: What was the appeal of coming back to play at your home club?**

AS: It was initially just to be back playing with my mates that I grew up playing with such as Madi, Johnno and Shep. Brucey Andrews was also in my ear

***(Madi Andrews piped in at this moment) we actually grew up next door to each other.***

AS: Yeah Aaron and I were always hanging with Jordy and Mads, playing cricket or riding bikes so we grew up together. And I also just wanted to get back to a more relaxed environment. At the end of my time at West Coast I was starting to hate footy. So I just wanted to enjoy my footy again.

**TA: What was the transition back to local footy like?**

AS: Well it was difficult in the first few weeks. It's a different style of footy and I was used to being given the ball and at this level you need to win your own ball a bit more. But once I got to know my team mates and the game style a bit more it was good.

**TA: Do you have any pre-game rituals?**

AS: Yeah a little bit. Nothing much pre warm up but once we come back into the rooms, mads and I like to have our red bulls and some No-Doz's. I used to have a few at West Coast where I had a very structured routine. I would listen to music at a certain time and take things at a certain time but I found in the end it didn't really matter. I used to like running out last or second last but now I like running out first. You have your games where you play well and think maybe I should add that into my routine as well. But yeah I don't know if it has much impact.

**TA: Alright we'll move past footy now, you are a natural athlete, what other sports do you enjoy watching or playing?**

AS: I'm getting into golf at the moment.

**TA: Yeah I believe you have sort out some golf lessons recently?**

AS: Haha no but I've definitely been thinking about it. Obviously Mads and Bruce are good players and a couple of the other guys that I play with are pretty good so I would like to get better. I enjoy playing it's generally a more relaxed game, well sometimes I guess. It can be frustrating at times though. But I've been enjoying it lately.

**TA: You've got a few tattoos? How many do you have and do they have any meaning behind them?**

AS: They started off having some meaning. The whole right sleeve has some meaning. The roses represent my family members. The November Rain represents that nothing lasts forever. The dead girl and the hour glass with the candle represent death. The owl didn't really mean anything to begin with but now it has the time that I was born. Then after that I ran out of ideas so the rest are just things that I think look good. I've spent probably forty hours getting tattooed. A fair bit of time, money and pain but I enjoy them.

**TA: You like to think you're better than the average bloke. Hows the fashion label going?**

AS: I knew this would come up at some stage but nah it's not going well.

**TA: Can you elaborate a little please?**

AS: Well it went down the gurgler a few years ago. I started the company with Koby Stevens and we found that initially people would just buy our stuff because we played footy. We both enjoyed our fashion but we went at it a bit half arsed. We put a bit of money in and designed everything ourselves but we didn't really employ someone who knew what they were doing to market it a bit further. We didn't really lose any money on it but we weren't making enough money for the time we were putting in. I'd come home from training and have 20 orders to do and I had boxes of shit throughout my house and by the end I was happy to just chuck it in. Koby is starting up new product at the moment with Matt Suckling so he's having another crack.

**TA: The money from playing AFL would have been nice, what was your first big purchase with your first big contract?**

AS: Well my manager was very strict with my money at the start and didn't let me spend it but my first big purchase was probably buying a sound system for my SS. I lashed out on about 4-5K worth of sound system and I still remember pulling out of JB Hifi with all my windows down blasting *Gasolina by Daddy Yankee*. I was so happy with it and it was a great moment haha.

**TA: I thought it was the Harley?**

AS: Haha no the Harley came post footy. I always wanted to get a bike but at the eagles you weren't allowed to have your motorbike license or have a bike. Funny thing was Chris Masten had his license the whole time and regularly rides around over in Perth, so I was little bit jealous but I got it eventually.

**TA: Do you follow AFL now and which team do you support?**

AS: I kept a close eye on the eagles early days, especially seeing the young guys that have developed since I was there. I didn't watch a lot of footy early days because I found I was analysing it too much, as we are taught to do. But I've started watching it again now. I've been thinking about picking a side recently, I went for the pies as a kid so they are kind of first choice but I think I need a bit more time to decide. If Koby was still playing for the dogs I may have chosen them but now he's at the saints and a lot of the boys at Berwick follow the saints so they are an option. There is no real massive desire to follow a side though.

**TA: You are recently married, building a new place in Officer, couple of pet bulldogs, kids on the horizon?**

AS: Not for at least another a year and a bit. Need to get this house built first. Don't really want to be living with the in-laws while Courtney is pregnant I think that would be a disaster waiting to happen. Hard to deal with at the best of times, let alone pregnant. So we'll be holding off for a bit haha.

**TA: Thanks for the chat Gaz and thanks for not just giving us the stock standard response.**

AS: No worries mate.