

APOLOGY ACCEPTED

... BUT HOW WILL THE FANS AND TEAMMATES FARE?

JOSH ZIMMERMAN

ONE Andrew lost three weeks of AFL football and the ability to chew for a month.

The other, ultimately, a premiership medal.

For all of the talk of forgiveness and mended friendships, today's first meeting between Fremantle and West Coast since the infamous events of August 5 last year represents the true test of whether either club has really consigned that afternoon to the past.

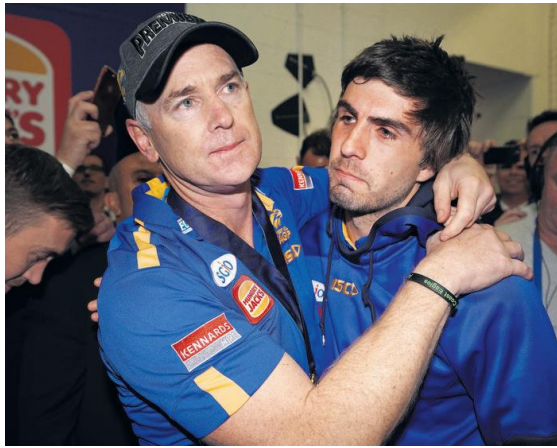
But as they take to the field at Mandurah's Rushton Park, the brutal Andrew Gaff punch that shattered Andrew Brayshaw's jaw will inevitably loom large in the minds of both the players directly involved and their teammates.

Put Mark Brayshaw, Andrew's father, in the camp that believes the hatchet has been buried.

He said his youngest son was "a tough little fellow" and there were no signs he was suffering from any lasting physical or psychological effects — a belief borne out by the midfielder collecting 25 disposals and earning a place in the Dockers' best in his first hit-out against Collingwood last week.

"We've taken a lot of comfort from the way the Dockers have taken care of him, he really has been in very good hands since the incident," Mr Brayshaw said.

"His progression has involved all sorts of milestones and from his perspective I know he is treating (today's) game just like any other."



Take that: Andrew Gaff hits Andrew Brayshaw last year, breaking his jaw, far right. Centre: Eagles coach Adam Simpson with Gaff after the game.

A former AFL player and father to three sons currently playing in the competition — including at both the Eagles and Dockers — Mr Brayshaw said the intense interest from the media and general public was at odds with the approach of the two Perth clubs.

"He and Gaff have shaken hands and an apology has been given and accepted. Andrew seems to be in a good place and for those reasons I think it will play out like any other game," said Mr Brayshaw, who is also the boss of the AFL Coaches Association.

To gauge just how large the derby incident will loom in today's game, Performance Boost sports psychologist Shayne Hanks recommends looking to the respective benches at the start of the game.

"If either Gaff or Brayshaw starts on the bench that is probably a sign the coaching staff don't want to let it become an issue and would prefer to avoid the whole thing," Mr Hanks

said. "My expectation is at least one or two Dockers players will be keen to give Gaff an early reminder they haven't forgotten what happened."

"That said, I don't think it will degenerate into anything more than a bit of push and shove early in the game to make a statement."

Fellow sports psychologist Gareth J. Mole, of Condor Performance, also predicted a lack of fireworks.

He said AFL clubs and players were far too professional to repeat scenes like those witnessed during the Demolition Derby in 2000.

"If a revenge kind of mindset was actually useful for performance, why wouldn't teams always try to create one — why not pretend the player you are marking said something abusive about your girlfriend for instance?" Mr Mole said.

"It's just not useful and teams have recognised that."

Instead, Mr Mole said it would be useful for both Gaff and Brayshaw to accept and

normalise any negative thoughts or emotions they may be feeling ahead of the game.

"As a general rule, the amount of relevance given to thoughts in sports is massively overrated," he said. "One of the primary reasons professional athletes are so good is the number of hours they spend executing their skills compared to normal people."

"That muscle memory isn't affected because you are having negative thoughts, only if you become hung up on them."

Mr Hanks said the reported off-field conciliatory steps between Brayshaw and Gaff, and the latter's clear and genuine remorse for his actions, had likely taken a lot of the sting out of their on-field reunion.

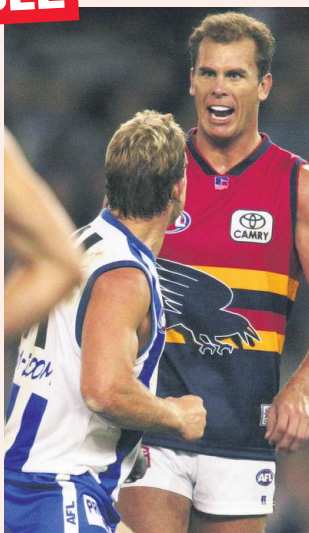
"Clubs nowadays can't afford to be thinking about last season," he said. "I don't think any player from either side is enough of a loose cannon to do something really silly and risk a suspension."



OTHER NOTABLE COMEBACKS

Wayne Carey

Wayne Carey's fall from grace after the discovery of his affair with the wife of best friend and Kangaroos vice-captain Anthony Stevens is well documented. After being exiled by his teammates and club, the double premiership winner spent all of 2002 out of football and there was speculation he was done with the game for good before he signed with Adelaide ahead of the 2003 season. An injury-plagued Carey never fully regained his



once dominant form, but saved one of his best performances for his first clash with his former club,

Ben Cousins

Another notable comeback involving a West Coast Eagle was that of Ben Cousins — twice.

The Brownlow Medallist's drug problem meant he was first banished from the club in March 2007, spending four weeks in a California rehab facility before making a triumphant return to AFL football against Sydney at Subiaco Oval that July, inspiring his side to victory with 38 possessions. The next comeback came for Richmond in Round 1 2009, after Cousins had been permanently exiled by a



Barry Hall

Perhaps the most famous punch captured by cameras on an AFL field is the one thrown by Sydney's Barry Hall that felled Eagle Brent Staker in 2008. Staker missed just one game with a concussion, but vision of the incident travelled

around the world and resulted in a seven-game suspension for Hall. Staker returned to the field two weeks later against the Western Bulldogs — and was promptly reported in the first quarter for striking Bob Murphy. The defender was granted a

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