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**My heroes:** Eagles supporter Patrick Withers, 11, of Merredin was as proud as punch to meet Dean Cox and Nic Naitanui. [More pictures page 8.](#)

## Two big Eagles land in Merredin

AT 203 centimetres tall and 107 kilograms and 201 centimetres and 109 kilograms, West Coast Eagles' AFL star ruckmen Dean Cox and Nic Naitanui were big hits with their Merredin supporters last Wednesday.

Cox, 32, the more than 270-game Eagles veteran, was booked as guest speaker at a function organised by the Nukarni Football Club as part of the Aglime of Australia Mates 500 Relay which passed through Merredin last Thursday on its way to finish at Manjimup tomorrow after 11 days, 1500 kilometres and 40 regional towns.

At the last minute his team-mate Naitanui, 23, the high-marking Fijian-born star with the distinctive dreadlocks hairstyle, agreed to join him.

They were greeted by a packed house at the Merredin Regional Community and Leisure Centre's Grandstand Bar by Eagles supporters, local children and the Mates Relay runners and entourage.

They posed for photographs and signed memorabilia at \$2 a time to raise funds for the men's health issues being supported by the Mates Relay, before auctioneer Robert 'Tiny' Holly formally introduced them to the crowd.

Cox and Naitanui in turn told the crowd their personal history and how they became involved in AFL before answering questions from Holly and the crowd, including amusing anecdotes on themselves and team-mates they have played with, before leaving for the return trip to Perth.



**New runner:** Simon Duckworth, one of three new runners to join the relay at Trayning, pounds the pavement past Merredin cemetery on the way to Bruce Rock.

Later sporting memorabilia signed by the pair was auctioned by Holly.

Mates Relay organiser and one of the runners, Paul Omodei, said the reception the runners and Cox and Naitanui received in Merredin was "fantastic".

Ten runners set off from Mukinbudin on Monday last week, running in a relay.

They start each day at or before sunrise to cover the distance and stopped overnight at Wongan Hills, Trayning, Bruce Rock, Corrigin and Kulin.

Three new runners joined the relay on the Trayning to Bruce Rock leg.

The event, which was started by six mates from Manjimup in 2011, is raising funds for the Regional Men's Health Initiative and Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia.