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'Vulnerable' Cousins has made his bed . . . now he awaits the verdict



Troubled footballer Ben Cousins in Megan Roodenrys' *Day Sleeper 1* portrait. BELOW: The artist with her Archibald Prize entry. PICTURE: STEPHEN SAUNDERS

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THERE is no hint of the showy tattoo defiantly declaring "Such is life". There is no hint of defiance at all in Megan Roodenrys portrait of troubled footballer Ben Cousins.

Instead, the former party boy lies alone, a vulnerable figure holding himself tight, naked except for a wristwatch — a reminder that all times, both great and inglorious, pass.

For Cousins, time is almost up. The self-confessed drug addict — who, as depicted in his portrait, has been laid bare during a very public rehabilitation — will find out this week if his AFL career is over. After being sidelined in the recent national draft, he will learn his fate on Tuesday in the pre-season draft. Richmond is tipped to pick him but if they don't, and Cousins is left adrift, he will survive the blow.

Roodenrys, an Adelaide artist, said Cousins is strong and purposeful, a man who has fought to regain his dignity after being forced to first admit and then battle his demons in public.

"It's a complex task to represent a strong and purposeful man in a vulnerable and uncertain state, whilst still conveying a sense of his innate strength," Roodenrys said in her artist's statement about her *Day Sleeper* series of portraits of Cousins. The portrait of Cousins in bed is on display at Pivotal Galleries in Richmond until December 24.

Roodenrys, 40, who is finishing off a larger painting of Cousins for next year's Archibald Prize, said the footballer spoke openly during their three sittings together about his struggle to get clean.

The subsequent *Day Sleeper 1* oil on canvas painting of him in bed was all about "being lost, vulnerable, awake, bound up and unable to move in what appears to be a rich and comfortable place", while two paintings of Cousins under a shower, displayed on her website, represent washing away the past.

"I've had experience with a few people who have had addiction issues and I've got a lot of admiration for people who can get themselves out of that situ-



ation," Roodenrys said. "It's a very hard ask to do that and I felt he had a particularly hard road because of the huge amount of media attention."

Roodenrys said she was intrigued by Cousins and approached his manager to ask if he wanted to have his portrait painted. She met him for the first time in August. "He was interested in something other than the way he is usually portrayed, someone looking at him more as a person rather than an identity, the football star, the bad boy," she told *The Sunday Age*.

She said Cousins had "an interesting depth to his character". "The impression I got was he was on the road to recovery and it was something he really wanted to do, but he has his good days and his bad days. There's a real sweetness there but there's also some demons he's had to fight and you can see that in his personality."

Cousins, who was suspended for 12 months last November for bringing the game into disrepute, was cleared last month by the AFL Commission to enter the national and pre-season drafts. Tuesday's draft is his last hope, but Richmond must wait until Monday to see if the commission will allow it to move Graham Polak — who suffered brain injuries after being struck by a tram — on to the rookie list, clearing up an extra choice in the pre-season draft.

"I can confirm that the Richmond Football Club has spoken to Ben Cousins, but at this stage we haven't made any decision on whether we're going to take him," said club president Gary March. "We've got to await the outcome of the commission's decision."