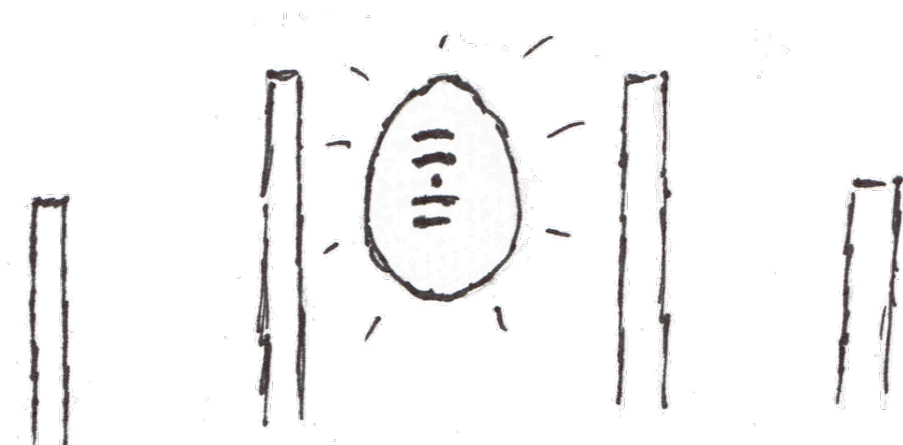


HAND-EGG 2018



An AFL guide for the casual and curious.

By Jack McGinn

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INTRODUCTION

Like so many ‘good’ ideas, the initial Hand-Egg 2018 concept came about following a few glasses of wine on the back porch of a North Perth three-by-two with a friend who felt he was missing out on AFL-related banter.

Footy often assumes its audience already has a knowledge of the game. This publication is designed to offer some colloquial context to the teams, rules and terms which define AFL as a sport and some of the notable players plying the trade.

It is poorly illustrated and at times focuses on obscure information rather than statistics, but that’s exactly the way it was intended – a light guide for watching the game, rather than an in-depth analysis of the sport.

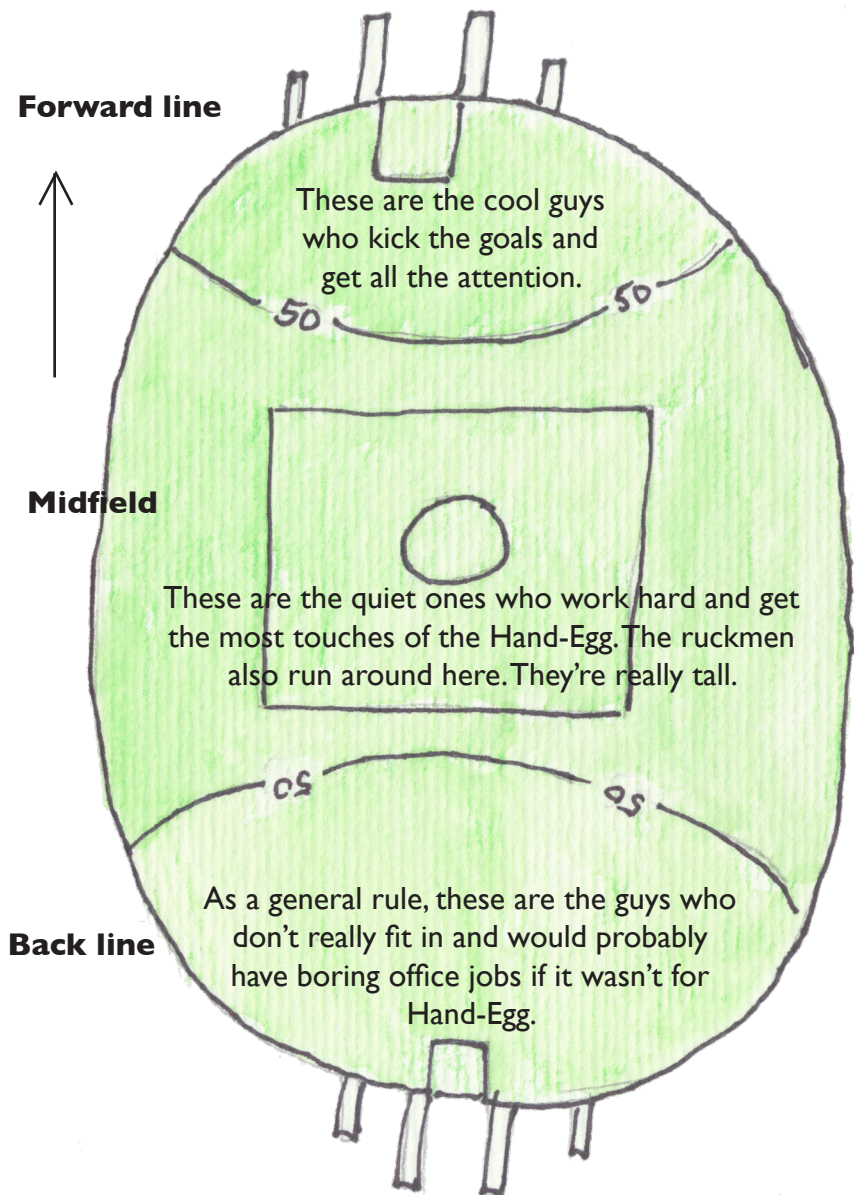
Most of the information within is sourced from my own experience with AFL. I was the kid who was misguided enough to wear a purple Fremantle Dockers fanny pack to primary school, the teenager with the worst tan on the under-14s premiership team, and have grown to spend hundreds of dollars on obscure footy memorabilia from the late 1990s.

A journalist by trade, Hand-Egg is my first attempt at self-publishing on a topic I am passionate about and any feedback is welcome. Contact details can be found at the back of the book.

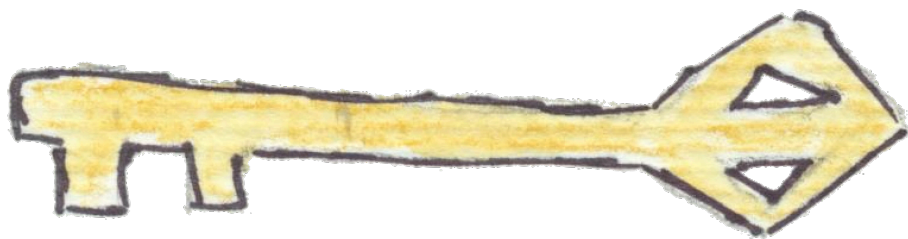
I hope you find as much enjoyment as I have in Hand-Egg 2018 - Jack.

A note on AFLW: This publication doesn't cover the newly established women's league, but only because of time constraints. The AFLW is one of the best things to happen to Hand-Egg in a long time.





Even the oval kind of looks like an egg...



KEY FOOTBALL TERMS...

Premiership/flag: The prize for the overall winner of the competition in any given season. Awarded to the winner of the Grand Final.

Ladder: The table ranking the performance of each side based on wins, losses and draws. The top eight teams play finals.

Brownlow Medal: The award given to the best player in the competition in a season as voted by the umpires. Midfielders generally win this award as they get the most of the ball.

Best and fairest: The award given to a club's best player in a season, as voted by the club's coaching staff.

Tall/key forward: A tall person who the team generally targets when kicking into their forward line. Kicks goals (or tries to). A key/tall defender is the one trying to stop them

Small forward: A shorter, faster, more opportunistic player who tends to work at the feet of the tall forward to get what they miss.

Midfielder: A player who runs all over the field and drives the play.

Ruckman: A very tall player who's primary job is to hit the ball to the advantage of his team's midfielders.

Young: AFL players are mostly drafted at 18, and are considered young until about 24. Age 30 is old.

AND A HAND-EGG KEY

TEAM NAME

Club History: A brief rundown of the club's recent history.

Talking points

2017: (ladder position) The general theme of the team's last season.

2018: What to expect from the team this season.

Now: Where the club seems to be going as of the beginning of the 2018 AFL season (potentially very wrong).

Coach at round 1, 2018: Coaches have a habit of being sacked mid-season. Lil head's up.

Captain: A short profile on the club's captain.

Heart & soul: A completely subjective player who typifies what this club is about. It may be a veteran or a rising star, or just someone in the middle who stands out a bit.

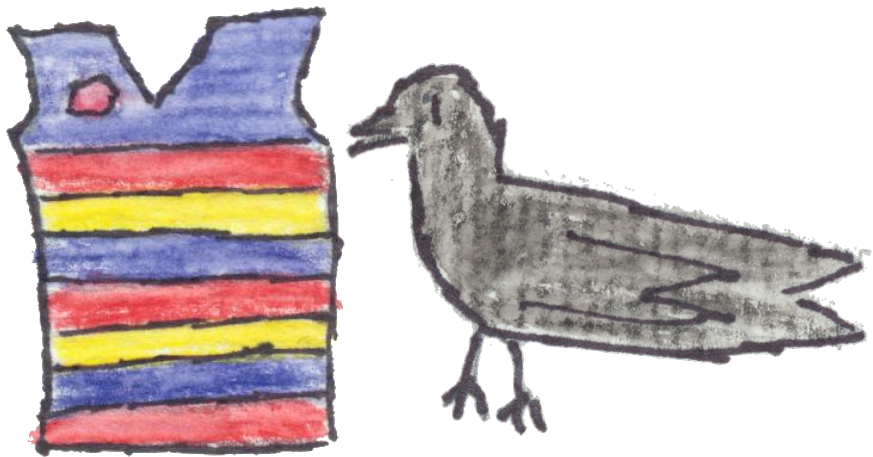
Miracle worker: These are players who are capable of doing the stuff people upload to YouTube later. Some clubs have more miracle workers than others.

Recruit: A player who has joined the team ahead of this season. Trades and drafting happen at the end of each season, so anyone traded or drafted in 2017 will represent their new club for the first time in 2018.

Cult hero: They may not be the best players their team has, but they sure have great hair/a strange name/a weird back-story.

Antagonist: A player opposition fans and players hate. Also subjective.

ADELAIDE CROWS



Club History: Adelaide entered the competition in the early 1990s, when the league turned from a Victorian-focused competition to a truly national one. Being the first South Australian club in the AFL meant the Crows had the pick of local talent, and they won consecutive premierships in 1997 and 1998. They've been very good since without winning another. Lost their coach in devastating circumstances in 2015.

Talking points

2017: Runner up (2/18) – So close, so far.

2018: How will they bounce back?

Now: Adelaide finished on top of the ladder in 2017, dominating the majority of the season and walking into the Grand Final as red-hot favourites. It wasn't to be for the Crows, with Richmond pulling off the biggest Grand Final upset in a long time since the Dogs in 2016.

In the offseason, the club lost a few young stars – Jake Lever and Charlie Cameron publicly sought clubs closer to their respective families – but the Crows should remain the team to beat in 2018.

Coach: Don Pyke

Captain: Taylor Walker #13

Tex copped some criticism at the end of last year for the way he handled the Grand Final loss and the request by young star Jake Lever to join another team, but the big key forward is admired by his peers for strong leadership qualities. Had a great mullet, now has a solid moustache.



Heart & soul: Rory Sloane #9

A talented, hard-running senior midfielder who is just about the heart of Adelaide's impressive midfield. Looks like Owen Wilson, probably says wow a lot.

Miracle worker: Eddie Betts #18

Electric small forward among the AFL's most exciting players. Kicks difficult goals regularly, makes Hand-Egg look easy (it's not).

Recruit: Bryce Gibbs #6

An Adelaide local, the Crows have been trying to get their hands on Gibbs since he was 17. He's now 29, but they finally have their man after a trade at the end of last year. A silky midfielder who played more than 200 games for Carlton, Gibbs is very talented and could finally hit his peak in an Adelaide jumper.

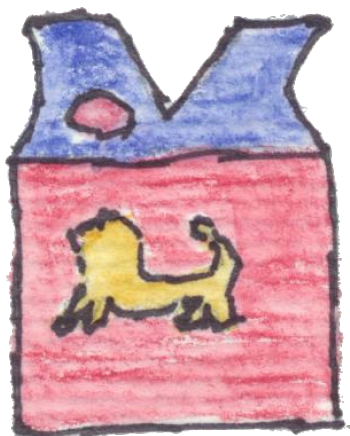
Cult hero: Josh Jenkins #4

Josh Jenkins is a very tall red-haired guy who has become a fan favourite at Adelaide after a slow start to his career. Was initially rookie-listed as a ruckman by Essendon but was traded to the Crows without having played a game has developed into a dangerous key forward.

Antagonist

As a neutral supporter Adelaide are a very likable team. I guess you can dislike them all because they're good.

BRISBANE LIONS



Club History: The Brisbane Lions were formed through the merger of the wildly unpopular Brisbane Bears and the cash-strapped Fitzroy Lions in 1996. The Lions were given a lot of concessions in their early years which culminated in three premierships between 2001 and 2003. They appointed former captain Michael Voss as coach in 2009 and when his wildly panned decision to recruit certified loose unit Brendan Fevola caused a number of players to leave. Struggled to retain players and fans since, but a new era may be here.

Talking points

2017: Wooden spoon (18/18) – A club in transition.

2018: A champion recruited.

Now: A host of young stars, led by tall Rafael Nadal lookalike Eric Hipwood and long-limbed, large-eared defender Harris Andrews, have revitalised the side in recent seasons. Add a touch of experience in Hawthorn premiership captain Luke Hodge, who shocked the AFL world by coming out of retirement to play at Brisbane in 2018, and Lions fans can dare to dream of the better times to come.

At least I think they can.

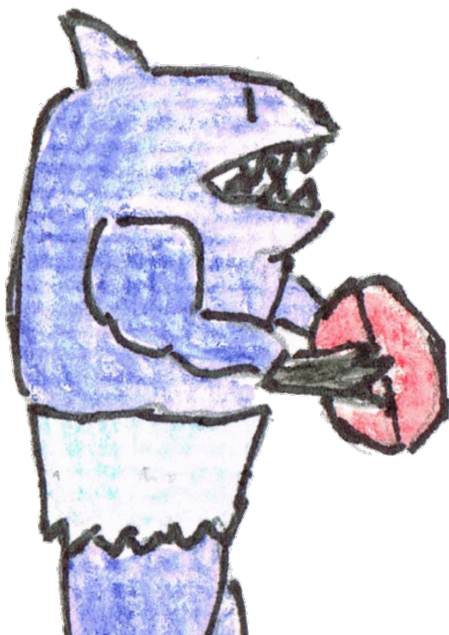
Coach: Chris Fagan

Captain: Dayne Beams #9

Dayne Beams joined Brisbane from Collingwood a few seasons ago, reuniting with his younger brother Claye at the Lions. Noticeable on-field for his distinctive sleeve of tattoos.

Heart & soul: Dayne Zorko #15

Brisbane has somehow managed to put together a list featuring two men named Dayne, both of whom are very good players. A midfielder/forward, Zorko is really short but gets heaps of Hand-Egg and kicks lots of goals.



Miracle worker: Eric Hipwood #30

Just 20 years old and 202cm tall, there's plenty of excitement around Hipwood. He may not yet be a consistent miracle worker but he's Brisbane's best tall forward prospect since world's blokiest bloke Johnathan Brown retired in 2014.

Recruit: Luke Hodge #2

33-year-old Hodge retired a Hawthorn legend in July, only to backflip and join the Lions when the season ended. Won four premierships with the Hawks, including three as captain. Wants to mentor the backline over the next few years. Will also help their marketing department...

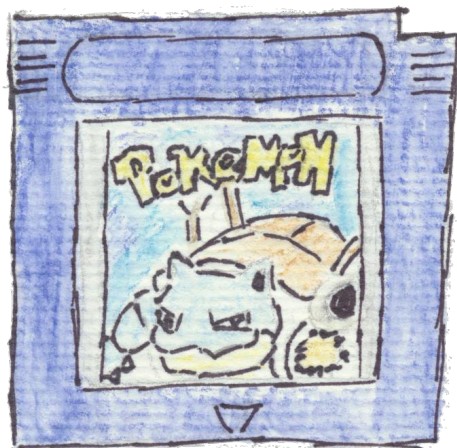
Cult hero: Harris Andrews #31

The lanky 21-year-old defender has two first names and disproportionately long limbs which make watch him play a real treat.

Antagonist: Mitch Robinson #5

Mitch Robinson looks and plays like a Street Shark. Often displays complete disregard for his own safety.

CARLTON BLUES



Club History: One of the oldest and proudest clubs in Australia, the wheels fell off for Carlton in 2002. The story goes that they recruited a player who was an accountant outside of football, and he realised they were paying players outside of their league-imposed salary cap and blew the whistle. The club copped a \$1 million fine and lost heaps of picks in the next two drafts. They didn't recover for a long time, and despite fielding legit champions like Chris Judd and Anthony Koutoufides, the last 15 years have been a hard, unsuccessful slog for fans of the Blues.

Talking points

2017: *Youth group (16/18) – Young stars rising.*

2018: *The search for consistency.*

Now: Carlton's most recent crop of young talent broke records last year – at the end of every round the league nominates a young player for its Rising Star Award and the Blues took home more than any club ever has in a single year.

Still missed the finals then, but if their young players with an extra year of experience can pull it all together at once they'll be a team to watch in 2018.

Coach: Brendan Bolton

Captain: Marc Murphy #3

Murphy was the number one draft pick in 2005, and has carved out an impressive career for Carlton since. A smooth mover on-field, but there's really not much else to say. A generic footy captain guy.



Heart & soul: Kade Simpson #6

The 33-year-old Simpson has played 286 games for Carlton since 2003. I was in Year 6 in 2003 and I'm now a 25-year-old man. He's still there.

Miracle worker: Patrick Cripps #9

Cripps and Charlie Curnow are probably the brightest young talents on the Carlton list. At 22, Cripps has established himself as a future star. The 195cm midfielder (tall for his position) is recovering from an injury setback but is capable of anything.

Recruit: Matt Kennedy #7

Kennedy requested a trade out of GWS at the end of last year after just two seasons, and joins Carlton as a young midfielder with potential. Has a mop of black Lego hair that doesn't seem to move when he runs.

Cult hero: Jack Silvagni #1

Young Silvagni is a third-generation Carlton player. His father Stephen played 312 games for Carlton and was full-back in the AFL Team of the Century. Grandfather Sergio played 239 games and two premierships for the Blues. All three have worn the number 1 for the club. Jack looks about 12 but has shown OK signs in his first two seasons.

Antagonist: Jed Lamb #13

Maybe more of a hero than an antagonist. Lamb is pretty inexperienced but got under the skin of Hawthorn's James Sicily in a game last year, which was basically a delight for everyone not named James Sicily.

COLLINGWOOD MAGPIES



Club History: OK. So. Collingwood are the club with the biggest fan-base in the competition, and they've been hugely successful for years. They won the Premiership in 1990, and again in 2010, with lots of finals appearances in between. BUT the last few years have been a tough slog for the Pies. The catalyst has been the baffling support of under-performing coach and club legend Nathan Buckley. The club forced out Mick Malthouse, who won the premiership just two years earlier, to appoint Buckley in 2012 and its performance on and off-field has gone backwards since. Their president is the former host of Who Wants to be a Millionaire and they're a club people love to hate.

Talking points

2017: They did what? (13/18) – Re-signed their under-performing coach.

2018: Will they actually improve?

Now: Buckley was somehow re-signed for another two years, despite missing the finals every year since 2014. Scrutiny will be huge in 2018.

Coach: Nathan Buckley

Captain: Scott Pendlebury #10

Pendlebury comes from a basketball background, and despite having played AFL for more than a decade the commentators like to bring this up at every opportunity because they believe it gives him an advantage in contested situations. In honesty it probably does.



Heart & soul: Steele Sidebottom #22

At 26, Sidebottom is remarkably young for a player with almost 200 games under his belt. A cog in the 2010 premiership team, the club's vice-captain works as hard as any and has a great name.

Miracle worker: Jeremy Howe #38

Howe can jump really high, and regularly pulls off freakish marks (catches, essentially) with ease. His YouTube highlights are insane.

Recruit: Chris Mayne* #16

Mayne was actually recruited from Fremantle at the end of 2016 on a salary of \$2 million over four years. Despite this, he barely played for in 2017 and copped criticism from his coach in the press for under-performing in the club's reserves team. The Magpies barely traded ahead of this season, maybe a little gun-shy after this experience...

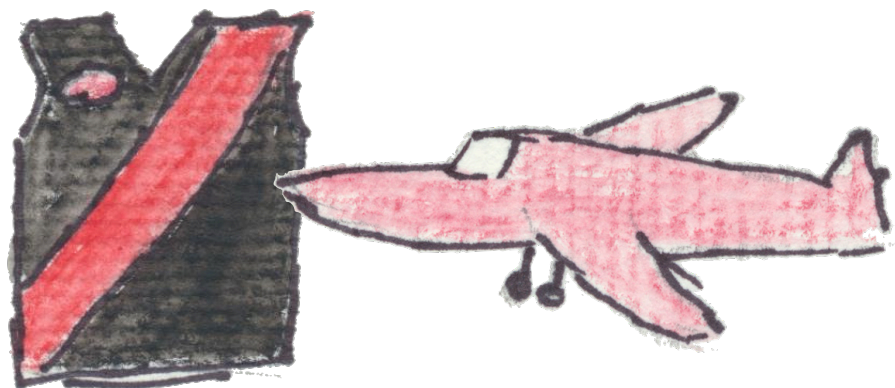
Cult hero: Josh Daicos #26

Josh Daicos has played two games but is the son of Pies legend Peter, who was an opportunistic small forward. Has big footsteps to follow.

Antagonist: Alex Fasolo #1

Fasolo's borderline cocky on-field mannerisms make him the target of criticism from opposition fans. Looks aren't everything, and he stepped away for a few weeks last year to work through some mental health issues. The game is better with players like him in it.

ESSENDON BOMBERS



Club History: Another of the league's old and successful teams, the Bombers were captained to glory in 2000 under the leadership of golden child James Hird. Hird was appointed coach in 2011, and on his watch the club experienced its darkest hour – a supplement scandal which saw 34 of its past and present players suspended for all 2016 for breaking international sport doping rules. It's unclear who at Essendon knew what about the supplement scandal and Hand-Egg 2018 throws no shade or blame and wishes those affected all the best. The sport is better for the end of what was a tumultuous ride for all players, coaches and sport scientists concerned.

Talking points

2017: Flying up (7/18) – Rediscovering relevance.

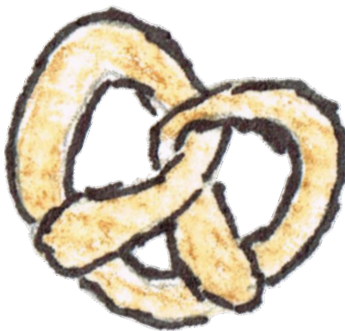
2018: New recruits, a new powerhouse?

Now: The Bombers got their players back and had a decent year in 2017, returning to finals and providing one of the feel-good stories of the season. If 2017 was good then the offseason was even better. They recruited three very exciting players from opposition clubs – including the talented but inconsistent Jake Stringer – and look like one to watch in 2018 if everything gels.

Coach: John Worsfold

Captain: Dyson Heppell #21

Heppell is pretty good and incredibly marketable – the ultimate 2000s athlete combo. Long blonde hair is distinctive on-field and draws the ire of those fans stuck in the 1950s for no good reason.



Heart & soul: Anthony McDonald-Tipungwuti #43

A footballer who never gave up, McDonald-Tipungwuti moved from Tiwi Islands to Victoria at 17 to chase his dream of playing AFL. This proved elusive until 2016, when with half the team suspended he made his debut and became a fan favourite for his defensive pressure.

Miracle worker: Joe Daniher #6

The Daniher name is synonymous with Essendon – Joe's father Anthony, uncles Terry, Chris and Neale and brother Darcy have all played for the Bombers. A lanky full-forward with a bad moustache and greasy hair, Joe's pedigree shines through more and more each year.

Recruit: Jake Stringer #25

Jake Stringer capped off an awful year in 2017 by getting an objectively awful tattoo of a Lion plastered across his stomach. Pushed out of the Western Bulldogs just 12 months after winning a premiership on the back of much publicised personal issues, Stringer, who also goes by the name 'the package', could prove a good investment if his head's where it needs to be in 2018.

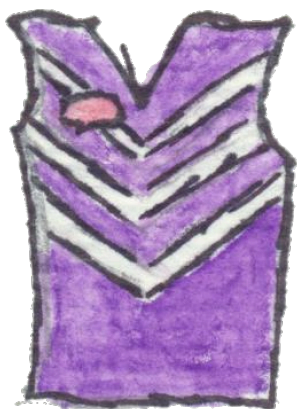
Cult Hero: Orazio Fantasia #13

Orazzziiioooooo Fantasiiaaaaaaa.

Antagonist: Brendon Goddard #9

Filmed flipping a bowl of pretzels in anger. Disrespectful to pretzels.

FREMANTLE DOCKERS



Club History: Regularly mediocre at drafting, trading and football, it's almost more emotionally draining for Fremantle fans when the club performs well than when it does poorly. I'm allowed to say that because it's my experience as an almost lifelong Freo fan. So many memories. Established in 1995, Freo took eight years to play finals and are still chasing their first premiership. Maybe they'll do it this year. Please?

2017: Weighed down (14/18) – Same old Fremantle.

2018: Same old Fremantle?

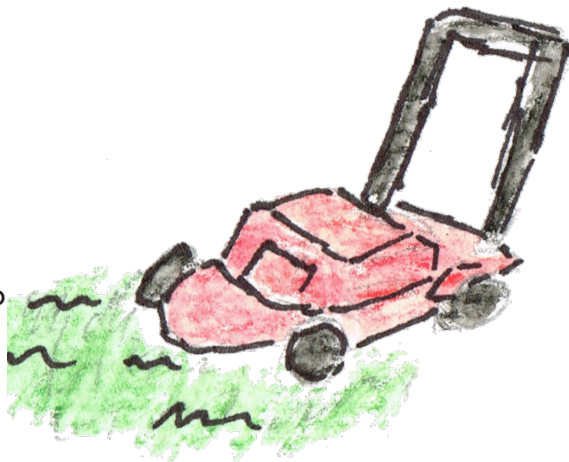
Now: The Dockers finished on top of the ladder in 2015, took a huge tumble in 2016 and leveled out somewhat in 2017 without improving too much. They finished 14th competition, focusing on youth development after a poor start to the season. Some promising young players did emerge and will be better for the run. Freo traded well at the end of the 2017 but as the club rebuilds its long-suffering fans can probably expect more of the same in 2018.

At least if they'll know how to deal with it.

Coach: Ross Lyon

Captain: Nathan Fyfe #7

Country boy turned top-knotted hipster guy who won the Brownlow Medal in 2015 before significant injury layoff. Used to have big ears but seems to have grown into them. Should get a full pre-season in this year, and is never far from the action when Freo play.



Heart & soul:

Aaron Sandilands #31

Sandilands is 211cm tall and 120kg, but has somehow strung together a storied career spanning 16 years. He's got a real Addams Family Lurch vibe going, used to mow lawns in the summer for some reason, and is about a head taller than 90 per cent of other people on the field.

Miracle worker: Michael Walters #10

An exceptionally talented forward-turned-midfielder, Walters overcame some serious early career issues to become one of Fremantle's most important players. Always had heaps of potential, has become more consistent in recent years.

Recruit: Nathan Wilson #14

Traded in from GWS and in his first press conference he told reporters how much he hated cross-town rival West Coast. Good signs.

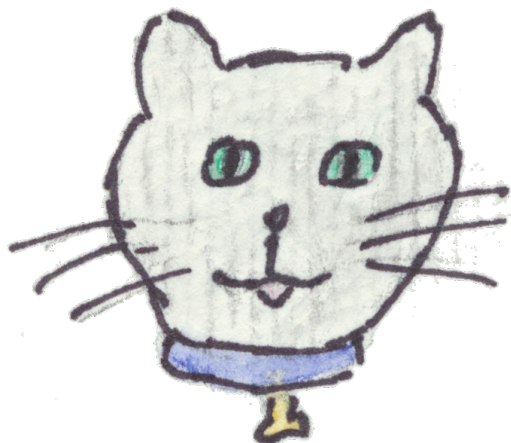
Cult hero: Cam McCarthy #23

McCarthy arrived at Fremantle last year with a moustache, a greasy topknot and a laid back demeanour and captured Freo fans' hearts.

Antagonist: Hayden Ballantyne #1

Ballantyne has earned a reputation for getting under the skin of anyone not wearing purple and white. Plays with a loveable, rat-like demeanour.

GEELONG CATS



Club History: Geelong went a very long time last century without winning anything, then won everything for a little while. Now they seem to be steadily good. Their premierships in 2007, 2009 and 2011 were won off the back of a host of stars, many of whom have retired, but a new era is pushing through. A club with a culture like the Cats' will always be a threat (until it's not).

Talking points

2017: Purring (3/18) – Geelong does Geelong things.

2018: Prodigal son returns.

Now: 2018 marks the return of 33-year-old Gary Ablett Jr, who played 192 games for the Cats between 2002 and 2010 –including the first two of the aforementioned three premierships – before leaving to take up a big contract at the Gold Coast.

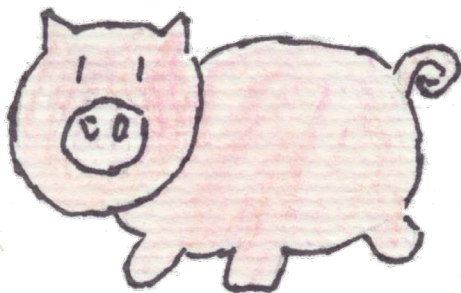
Ablett's father Gary Ablett Snr played for Geelong in the 1980s and 1990s and is widely regarded the greatest player of all time, and Ablett Jr may be the best the AFL has seen since. Geelong fans will be eager to see him run around in blue and white hoops again in 2018 and potentially beyond.

Coach: Chris Scott

Captain: Joel Selwood #14

Hand-Egg has never known an athlete to bleed as frequently as Joel Selwood. Seems to leave the field at least once a game with a cut to his forehead. Sometimes multiple times. I guess it's be-

cause he's tough. That's what people say. His brother Scott also plays for Geelong.



Heart & soul: Harry Taylor #7

A cognac drinking WWII buff who once played a full game with a piece of ham in his sock so he could prank an opposition player at the end of it, Taylor is also a very reliable key defender and premiership player. But the ham thing. Honestly.

Miracle worker: Patrick Dangerfield #35

The 2016 Brownlow Medalist, Dangerfield is a player in a class of his own. A dominant midfielder, the former Crow turned Cat shifted forward at times in 2017 and proved almost impossible to match up on. Likeable but annoying – the Ed Sheeran of Hand-Egg.

Recruit: Gary Ablett Jr. #4

Son of 'God' returns. A scary thought if he can stay fit.

Cult hero: Wylie Buzza #12

Wylie Buzza's name is Wylie Buzza, and he has a fantastic curly mullet style haircut which fits the name perfectly. A player on the fringes of the senior team at the moment.

Antagonist: Darren Milburn (retrospective)

I'm bending the rules here. Darren Milburn retired in 2011, but he's still the worst because of what he did to Stephen Silvagni in 2001. Have a google if you get the chance.

GOLD COAST SUNS



Club History: The Gold Coast is famous for a lot of things, but sport is not one of them. In keeping with this the Suns still haven't made any real impact on it since inception in 2011.

They've never played finals, they draw low crowds, and their lack of success in a retiree/schoolies hotspot seems to keep people away. But the AFL pushed hard for this club to exist on the back of its desire to grow the popularity of the sport in Queensland, where rugby is king, and the league is determined for it to succeed.

Talking points

2017: Another flop (17/18) – Was this a mistake?

2018: I guess we'll find out...

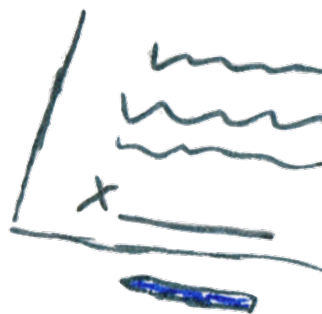
Now: With a highly-regarded new coach in Stuart Dew and a star recruit in former Fremantle midfielder Lachie Weller, it feels like there is a lot riding on the future of the Gold Coast in 2018.

The captain Lynch, a native Victorian who would command heaps of money wherever he played, has already put off contract talks until the middle of the year. This is usually a sign of a player weighing up offers from elsewhere...

Coach: Stuart Dew

**Captain: Tom Lynch & Steven May
#19 & #17**

Probably the two best players at the club, May and Lynch are both inaugural Suns who took over from Gary Ablett as captains in 2016. They act as bookends for the side – Lynch is a big key forward, and May a strong defender.



Heart & soul: David Swallow #24

Swallow was the number one draft pick in 2010, and has served with distinction since. The first player not named Gary Ablett to win a Suns best and fairest, Swallow has had his battles with injury over the last few years but seems to be back to his best.

Miracle worker: Jack Martin #4

Will be 23 this year and seems ready to become a star. A player capable of anything who has shown signs of both in the forward and back half of the ground, he will be looking for greater consistency in 2018.

Recruit: Lachie Weller #14

The Gold Coast's decision to trade the second pick in last year's draft to Fremantle for male model/poster boy/midfielder Weller was one of the surprises of the off-season. There's never been that many players requesting trades to the Suns. Weller bucked the trend.

Cult hero: Michael Barlow #20

Michael Barlow has badly broken his leg twice in his career, including once last year, but in between has forged a reputation as a hard-working midfielder and popular team man. Another former Freo player.

Antagonist: Steven May #17

The co-captain knocked out Brisbane's Stefan Martin in 2016 – a move which got him suspended for five weeks and briefly had the Suns in the spotlight. It spiced up the rivalry between the two Queensland teams.

GREATER WESTERN SYDNEY GIANTS



(actually
mostly regular
sized)

Club History: GWS is the newest team in the competition, having joined in 2012, and has performed pretty well considering very few people in Western Sydney have any interest in the sport. They've finished high on the ladder the last few seasons, and in 2016 came within a kick of the grand final.

GWS have had a lot of players who joined the club young at the beginning and are starting to come into their prime.

Talking points

2017: Nearly there (4/18) – Good but not great.

2018: List depth a new challenge.

Now: However, a lot of those young players have gone home/left the club, and for the first time in its history the club has question marks over the depth of talent on its list. Retained ultra-talented Josh Kelly at the end of last season despite intense interest from Victorian clubs. The Giants have kept getting close to dominating but losing out in big moments when the pressure is on. They'll be a really scary team if they can nail those big moments

Coach: Leon Cameron

Captain: Phil Davis & Callan Ward #1 & 8

There's something about the expansion clubs and dishing out co-captaincies. Ward and Davis have done the job for GWS since inception, with Davis a brave key defender and Ward a tough midfielder.



Heart & soul: Heath Shaw #23

Heath Shaw was Collingwood royalty and part of their 2010 premiership team, but then got pushed out because of poor behaviour. Is now in his 30s and has become a leader at GWS but still occasionally acts up.

Miracle worker: Josh Kelly #22

2017 was a breakout season for Kelly, who put aside speculation over his future to dominate pretty much every week.

Recruit

After securing established stars Brett Deledio and Ryan Griffen from Richmond and the Western Bulldogs in recent years the Giants had a quiet trade period at the end of 2017.

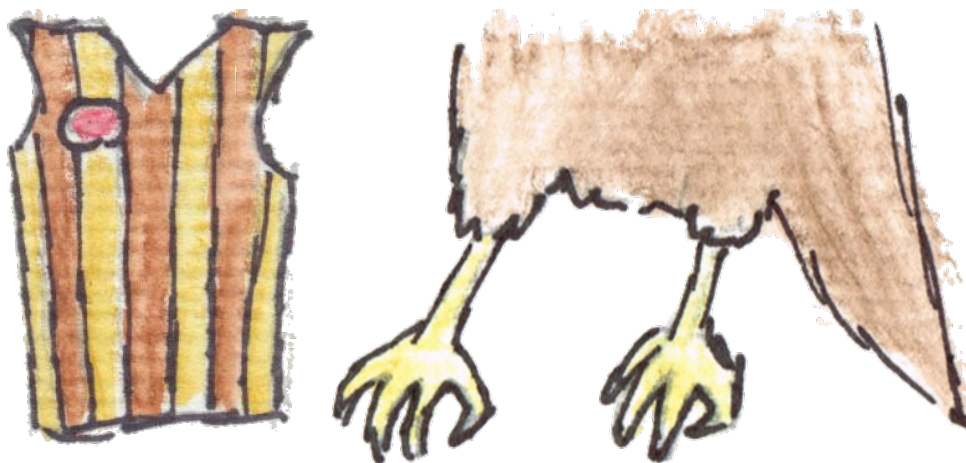
Cult hero: Dawson Simpson #26

A little bit of a left-field pick, the 210cm former Geelong ruckman played his first game for GWS late in 2017 – his second year on the list. May not be the most talented player but highly popular and likely to play a bigger role now fellow ruckman Shane Mumford has retired.

Antagonist: Toby Greene #4

Just about the AFL's chief antagonist at this point. The freakishly talented Greene keeps getting suspended for doing dumb stuff like punching people. Has a boyish face and haircut and face which doesn't help his bratty reputation with fans/maybe it's just me.

HAWTHORN HAWKS



Club History: Under the coaching expertise of small, angry man named Alistair Clarkson and captaincy of Luke Hodge, the Hawks were the dominant club of the mid-2010s.

The club won three consecutive premierships from 2013-2015, and were basically unbeatable in between (Geelong seemed to be the exception). But all 'good' things come to their end eventually, and with their stars getting older and retiring the Hawks finally missed the finals in 2017.

Hawthorn also dominated the late 80s. An annoyingly successful club.

Talking points

2017: More like Mortalhorn (12/18) – An era ends.

2018: Hodge-less Hawks.

Now: Club legend Hodge retired and subsequently backflipped to join Brisbane, and for the first time in almost two decades the Hawks will enter a season without him. However, successful clubs in the AFL never seem to be down too long. The Hawks have a few young stars on the up and could be back up there in a few years.

Give someone else a turn, mates.

Coach: Alistair Clarkson

Captain: Jarryd Roughead #2

Roughead is a Hawthorn institution. The 31-year-old key forward has played in four premierships for the club over his 13 years there. Has had setbacks with skin cancer over the last few years but he's since fully recovered.



Heart & soul: Tom Mitchell #3

A bit of a surprise call since 2018 is only his second season with the Hawks, but Mitchell broke out last year and looks likely to drive the midfield for the next decade. In one game he disposed of the ball 50 times – three short of the all-time record.

Miracle worker: Cyril Rioli #33

The Rioli family has a long-standing history of producing outstanding AFL footballers, and Cyril has lived up to his name since his debut in 2007. Doesn't get heaps of the ball but regularly does things that don't seem possible. Has some sort of wing tattoo on his back.

Recruit: Jarman Impey #4

Impey surprised Port Adelaide by requesting a trade to Hawthorn at the end of 2017. Will add run and flair to the Hawks' back-half, and another great sounding name to their list.

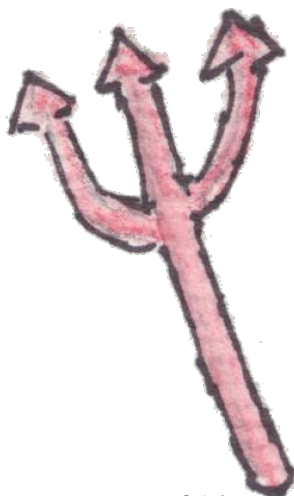
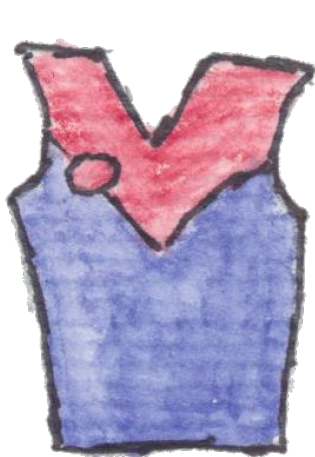
Cult hero: Jaegar O'Meara #10

Originally from Geraldton, Jaegar O'Meara looks as fake as his name sounds – like some kind of Adonis-Ken doll hybrid.

Antagonist: James Sicily #6

Last year the cameras picked up what looked like Sicily starting on his own teammate, and he's been the centre of attention ever since. AFL players usually avoid fighting their teammates where possible.

MELBOURNE DEMONS



Club history: Melbourne last won a premiership in 1964, and last played finals in 2006. They went through a phase in the mid-to-late 2000s of hyping up their early draft picks, most of whom have left the club without success, but the team they've put together for 2018 looks likely to finally challenge for a finals spot again.

Talking points

2017: So close, so far (9/18) – Last minute heartbreak.

2018: Finally finals-bound?

Now: Coming into the last game of the 2017 season a series of unlikely results had to play out across the competition for Melbourne to miss finals. Somehow all happened, and Melbourne missed out again. To add to the embarrassment, the club had thousands of flyers printed and mailed to their members in the days following explaining how to access the finals tickets they wouldn't need.

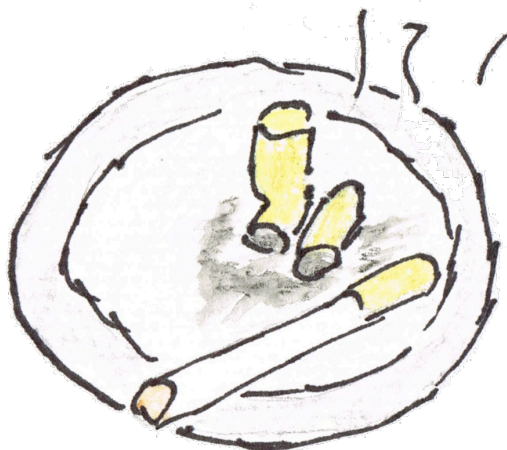
In 2018, the Dees will be aiming for finals, and dreaming of more given the surprise results of recent years.

Coach: Simon Goodwin

Captain: Nathan Jones #2

The 29-year-old Jones made his debut with Melbourne in 2006, and his seventh and eighth games for finals against St Kilda and Fremantle respectively. A sign of Melbourne's poor fortunes, he hasn't added to his finals tally in 230-odd games since.

A courageous bald man.



Heart & soul: Max Gawn #11

There's a rumour that a young Gawn used to smoke cigarettes in his car before training. The ruckman's professionalism has come a long way since then, and he's now one of the best in his role in the AFL. Also has the best beard in the competition.

Miracle worker: Clayton Oliver #13

Comes across as really bratty, but the flame-haired Oliver is a star. Kind of looks like that evil general guy from Star Wars. Not the robot one with all the arms, the other one.

Recruit: Jake Lever #8

21-year-old defender Lever was offered big money to join Melbourne at the end of last season, and he fell out with some at his old club after accepting it. He's really good at what he does.

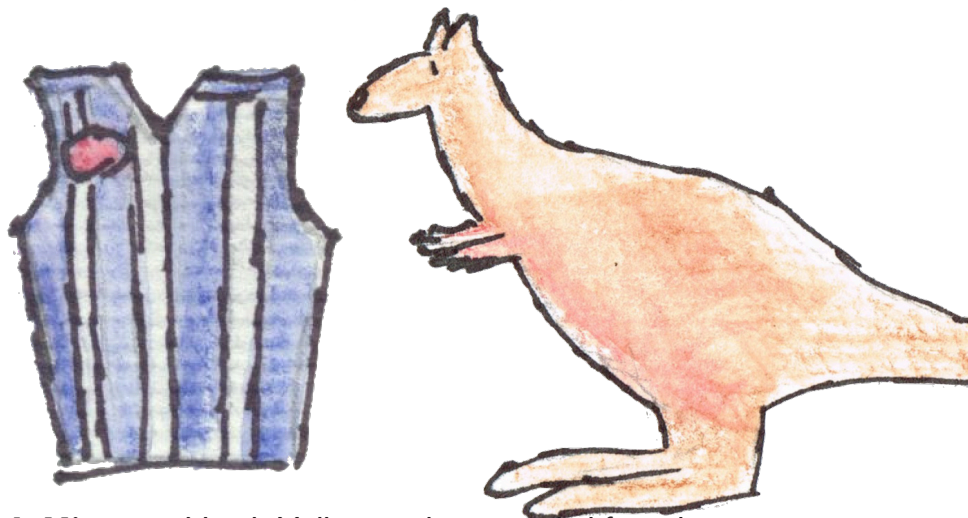
Cult hero: Jayden Hunt #29

Runs fast, wears a headband and is obsessed with owls.

Antagonist: Tom Bugg #32

Tom Bugg's career came to a crossroads in 2017 when he left-hooked Sydney's Callum Mills 100 metres off the play, knocking the latter out. The backlash was swift and the six-week suspension justified. Career may be at the crossroads if he doesn't make amends in 2018.

NORTH MELBOURNE KANGAROOS



Club History: North Melbourne has struggled for relevance to some extent since winning the premiership in 1999. The club has had its fair share of wins since, but has a smaller fan-base than its local rivals. Controversially made a number of senior players retire at the end of 2016, including AFL games record holder Brent Harvey, then struggled with a lack of experience in the squad in 2017. North's greatest ever player was Wayne Carey, who famously left the club in disgrace at the beginning of the 2000s.

Talking points

2017: 15/18 – Fishing without a bite.

2018: Is North relevant?

Now: Finished close to the bottom last year. To make things worse, they threw huge money at every big name looking to move clubs during the offseason and were publicly rejected by their targets several times.

Will likely be a similar story in 2018. Hopefully not.

Captain: Jack Ziebell #7

Ziebell took over as captain in 2017 and held the role under duress, with serious injuries threatening to derail his campaign. Somehow played out the season with cracked ribs and a broken collarbone. Will be looking for a fresh run this year, and improved performances from those around him.



Heart & soul?

The problem with forcing all your older players to retire is you lose some of your identity as a club.

Miracle worker: Ben Brown #50

Palm tree/Sideshow Bob lookalike who has become one of the most exciting key forwards in the competition seemingly out of nowhere. One of the few to have a career-best season in 2017 and should be even better this year.

Recruit: Alex Morgan #21

Unfortunately for fans, North didn't land the major recruit they so desperately wanted. Got Morgan from Essendon, which could be an inspired move but he never played a game there so its hard to know.

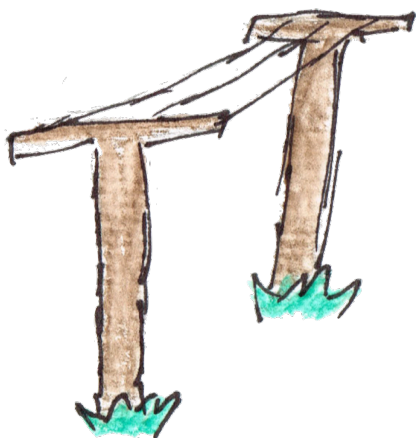
Cult hero: Majak Daw #1

The Sudanese-Australian ruck/forward has struggled for consistency his entire career, stringing together just 32 games since 2010 (there's 23 in a regular season). North continue to back him in. He has a good story.

Antagonist: Scott Thompson #16

He's getting kind of old and doesn't always get a game for North but Scott Thompson will forever be remembered for 'poking the bear' when playing on punch-happy boxer Barry Hall some years ago.

PORT ADELAIDE POWER



Club History: Founded in 1997, won a premiership in 2004 and has floated around the middle since. Lost the 2007 Grand Final by 119 points. A really business-minded club which is trying to tap the Chinese market by playing a game over there once a year.

Talking points

2017: Last gasp loss (5/18) – Stupid sexy Shuey.

2018: Destination discovered?

Now: Port beat almost everyone at its Adelaide Oval home last season, only to fall over against West Coast. Luke Shuey's after-siren goal in an elimination final broke Power hearts, prompting chairman and Sunrise bald man David Koch to question the integrity of his players. Port went on to recruit a series of experienced players from other clubs, proving itself a destination for those seeking change.

For a variety of reasons most these players weren't wanted at their original club, so whether they have the desired impact in 2018 remains to be seen. 2018 Port will be a fascinating watch.

Coach: Ken Hinkley

Captain: Travis Boak #1

Rivaled by Murphy from Carlton and Cotchin from Richmond, Boak might be the most generic captain in the AFL. A really good mid-fielder who has been at Port for a long time, but there's not a whole lot else to say.



Heart & soul: Robbie Gray #9

Gray is a forward-turned-midfielder who has starred for Port for a number of years now.

Miracle worker: Chad Wingard #20

One of the most popular Power players, Wingard has set the competition alight from the moment he arrived at Port in the 2011 draft thanks to his high leap and hipster fringe. Moved from the forward line to the midfield in 2017, and will likely build on this in 2018.

Recruit: Jack Watts #23

A former number one draft pick, Watts moved from Melbourne to Port at the end of 2017 in search of a fresh start. His career hasn't lived up to the expectation and pressure his former club heaped on him, but he will add experience and could fulfill his potential at his new home.

Cult hero: Justin Westhoff #39

Westhoff came on the scene more than a decade ago as a rake-thin Jon Heder lookalike who was somehow really good at marking the ball. Still pretty thin but now with a beard, Westhoff looks like a barista in one of those cafes where the staff are rude on purpose.

Antagonist: Tom Jonas #42

Jonas is by all accounts a really good bloke, but a few years ago he knocked out West Coast's Andrew Gaff and copped a six-game ban because it was a really bad hit. AFL fans never forget, just ask Darren Milburn (Geelong).

RICHMOND TIGERS



Club History: Until last year, Richmond's last win in a finals series came in 2001. The club had been a laughing stock for a long time. The Tigers defied the odds in 2017, winning their way through to an unlikely Grand Final appearance and then bloody winning the thing – their first Premiership since 1980.

Martin was the star all year – clocking in just about the best individual season in recent history and taking home every accolade on offer along with the flag.

Many Tiger fans emerged from the woodwork following the win, basking in the glory of the fluke premiership.

Talking points

2017: Huh? (Premiers) – A long wait over.

2018: Can they back it up?

Now: The premiership party was hard and scandalous, I probably don't need to go into that, but with fitness critical to success in the modern game it will be interesting to see how Richmond go early in 2018.

They'll want to avoid the fate of the Western Bulldogs, who missed the 2017 finals all together after winning the 2016 flag.

Coach: Damian Hardwick

Captain: Trent Cotchin #9

Why are all these captains so generic? Cotchin is a clean-cut and silky midfielder whose off-field reputation for not partying stands in direct contrast with loose unit Martin, a close friend of his.



Heart & soul: Alex Rance #18

Rance is widely regarded one of the best key defenders of his era, and has a real Clark Kent look going. The son of former West Coast Eagle Murray Rance and a Jehovah's Witness, he almost walked away from footy a few years back to focus on his faith. Richmond fans are thankful he didn't.

Miracle worker: Dustin Martin #4

Neck tat aficionado Martin compiled one of the best ever individual seasons in 2017 under incredible duress. Won the AFL Players Association MVP, the AFL Coaches Association MVP, the Norm Smith Medal, the Brownlow Medal and led Richmond to the premiership – the greatest miracle of all. Off-field he was out of contract and dealing with his father's deportation to New Zealand.

Recruit: Patrick Naish #45

Naish is a second generation Tiger drafted at the end of last year. His father Chris played 143 games for the club in the 1990s.

Cult Hero: Bachar Houli #14

The first practicing Muslim to win a flag. Created controversy earlier in the year when Malcolm Turnbull and Waleed Ali acted as character references for him in a tribunal hearing. It was pretty bizarre.

Antagonist: Reece Conca #30

Caused controversy in 2014 with a cheap hit to the back of an opponent's head. Hasn't played much lately because of injuries.

ST KILDA SAINTS



Club History: St Kilda actually drew a Grand Final with Collingwood in 2010, prompting a rematch which they lost. It was the closest they've been to winning since their only premiership in 1966. Despite a lack of ultimate glory the club had a very successful period in the late 2000s and early 2010s, when they dominated most clubs they came up.

The last-standing members of that team's core – Nick Riewoldt and Joey Montagna – retired last year, marking the end of a sometimes scandalous era.

The new generation has shown promising signs.

Talking points

2017: Champs depart (11/18) – Roo and Joey hop on.

2018: Why are we waiting?

Now: In theory the club has a number of young players and should be able to push on and challenge for a finals spot this season. But that's what people said in 2016.

Some even said it the year before.

Why things haven't quite clicked is anyone's guess, but coach Alan Richardson will be desperate to see significant improvement.

Coach: Alan Richardson.

Captain: Jarryn Geary #14

A highly-rated defender at St Kilda who is fairly anonymous outside of the club. Has a fairly cool name.

Heart & soul: Jack Steven #3

Many a tear was shed in 2017 when ball magnet Jack Steven cut off what was truly a masterpiece of a mullet. Fortunately the decision didn't impact his ability to get the ball. Steven is likely to figure prominently should you watch a Saints game this year.



Miracle worker: Seb Ross #6

Ironically the Saints are lacking in the miracle department, but the emergence of Ross is sure to please their long-suffering fans. The cousin of former Essendon captain Jobe Watson broke out in 2017 to win the best and fairest and show the talent pool runs deep in his family.

Recruit: Logan Austin #24

A player with two first names, the young key defender broke contract when he requested a move to St Kilda from Port Adelaide at the end of last year. The Saints were another who failed to attract a big fish but will be hopeful Austin comes good.

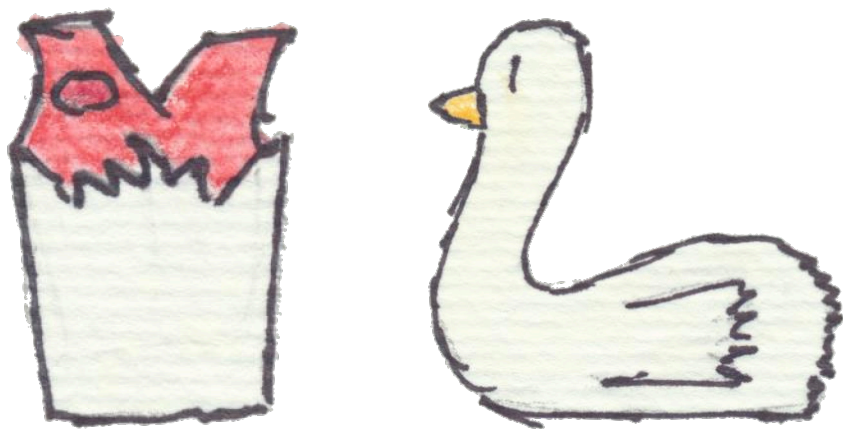
Cult Hero: Dylan Robertson #17

Seems to have been there forever, quietly doing a very good job. Last year people actually noticed which must have been nice for him.

Antagonist: Jake Carlisle #2

Carlisle started at Essendon, where he made a name for himself as a strong marking forward or defender with a bit of a temper. Joined St Kilda for a fresh start after a drug suspension in 2016. Continues to lose his cool at his new club, and got caught up in a sledging scandal with Carlton captain Mark Murphy in 2017.

SYDNEY SWANS



Club History: Sydney were once South Melbourne, but relocated to the harbour city in the 80s to build the popularity of the game in New South Wales. The club had a number of marquee players through the early Sydney years, including Tony Lockett and Warwick Capper. But its first flag as a Sydney-based team came in 2005 and was built on a team-first, effort-driven game plan. Won again in 2012, and has been one of the good teams for a long time now.

Talking points

2017: Rebounding (6/18) – big ol’ u-turn.

2018: Which way is up?

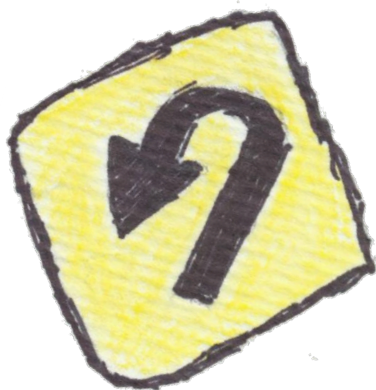
Now: There were a few smirks on the faces of opposition fans when they lost the first six games of the 2017 season and looked set to miss out on the finals. Being Sydney they turned it around, winning all but two of the rest of their games to make it comfortably.

Expectations will be high in 2018 on the back of last year’s performance, but the core of the side is a year older and surely they can’t stay this good forever?

Coach: John 'Horse' Longmire

Captain: Josh Kennedy #12

The son and grandson of Hawthorn royalty, Kennedy struggled to break through at the Victorian club early in his career and moved to Sydney. Has made a name for himself at the Swans, and is now among the competition's best players.



Heart & soul: Luke Parker #26

A Sydney midfield star, Parker is as good at marking the ball as he is at picking it up off the ground, and this makes him a dangerous proposition all over the ground. Not unlike Fyfe from Fremantle.

Miracle worker: Dan Hannebery #4

Once a party animal, Hannebery's decision to quit alcohol actually backfired last year when his form dropped at the start of the season. Improved when he relaxed the ban and returned to his midfield best.

Recruit: None

The Swans were very quiet during the trade period this year, so there's little to report that would likely be of interest to the casual observer.

Cult Hero: Alex Johnson #2

Still just 25 years old, Johnson last played for Sydney in their 2012 Grand Final win. Since then, he's suffered five knee reconstructions and 12 operations and barely played any football. Returned to the reserves for his first game in 1736 days in 2017.

Antagonist: Lance 'Buddy' Franklin #23

Buddy is a champion of the game, which means some fans don't like him. A key forward from WA who started at Hawthorn, he is now in the top 10 goalkickers of all time and is probably the only person playing today who is capable of one day topping the list.

WEST COAST EAGLES



Club History: West Coast became the first WA team in the then-VFL in the late 1980s, and showed the rest of the country what the state was capable of by winning the premiership in 1992 and 1994. Won again in 2006 with a highly talented but controversial squad which thrived under the intense microscope of Perth's football media. Another of the consistently good teams.

Talking points

2017: Bye guys (8/18) – The AFL retirement home.

2018: Will the youth emerge?

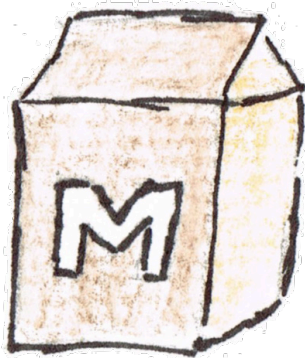
Now: A number of West Coast players retired at the end of 2017, including past Brownlow Medalists Matt Priddis and Sam Mitchell and old tall guy Drew Petrie. The retirements will give the Eagles a chance to play youth. The Eagles have young talent on their list for a while but have shied away from exposing it at the top level. In 2018 they'll be relying on it to get them through.

With a new logo, jumper and stadium ready to go, this year will serve as something of a refresh for the widely-respected club.

Coach: Adam Simpson

Captain: Shannon Hurn #25

A stocky defender, Shannon Hurn can kick the egg as far as anyone. The South Australian native has made a name for himself at West Coast over the years. Not the club's best player but an integral part of the team.



Heart & soul: Josh Kennedy #17

The bearded, choccy milk loving key forward from Northampton is a joy to watch when on-song. As good as any at kicking goals and an Eagles fan favourite.

Miracle worker: Nic Naitanui #9

High-leaping ruckman who missed all of 2017 with a knee injury, Naitanui is one of WA's favourite footballing talents. Will be all over WA TV and newspaper even if not playing again this year. Should return though.

Recruit: Liam Ryan #1

21-year-old Ryan's pro journey starts in 2018 after an apprenticeship which lasted longer than most. Made a name for himself with Rovers in Geraldton, before venturing to Perth to try out for East Fremantle in the WAFL. They weren't interested, but Subiaco was, and he spent two seasons regularly jumping on peoples' heads there before anyone was willing to take a chance on him. West Coast did.

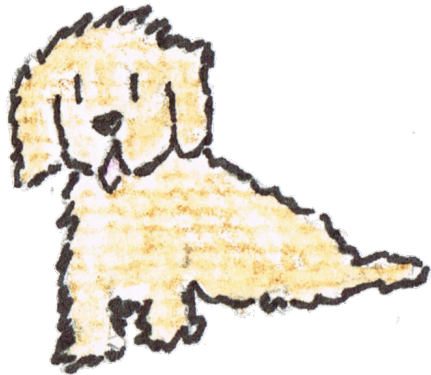
Cult hero: Willie Rioli #44

Another with huge potential who hasn't yet played a game, Rioli's first season at West Coast was cut down by injury. Fans are dying to see if he can live up to his famous footballing name. Great early signs.

Antagonist: Chris Masten #7

Short man who probably cops it more from his own team's fans than anyone else. Once bit Fremantle's Nick Suban, which is a pretty weird thing to do.

WESTERN BULLDOGS



Club History: The club formerly known as Footscray shocked the AFL world in 2016, winning the premiership from seventh place on the ladder. It was their first grand final since 1961, and broke a 62-year drought. The years before were mostly barren, with the club struggling financially at times and a number of great players coming and going without success.

Talking points

2017: Need water. (10/18) – A season-long hangover.

2018: A tyre change or new engine?

Now: Plenty was expected of the Bulldogs in 2017 after their young team shocked the competition the previous season. However, form issues combined with Jake Stringer's public off-field problems and the team never really got going. Stringer left the club at season's end, and captain Bob Murphy retired alongside veteran Matthew Boyd and experienced recruit Travis Cloke.

With the distractions gone and more young talent on board, the Bulldogs will hopefully get back to their exciting best in 2018 and make the finals again.

Coach: Luke Beveridge

Captain: Easton Wood #10

Captained the team to the 2016 flag in the absence of Bob Murphy, and takes on the gig full time in 2018. Courageous defender whose ability to mark the ball under pressure makes him a widely respected AFL figure.

Heart & soul: Dale Morris #38

Will be 36 in December, but is still kicking on in defence for the Dogs. Courage is his hall-mark, and this was typified by the revelation that he played the entire 2016 finals series, including the grand final, with a fractured vertebrae.



Miracle worker: Marcus Bontempelli #4

Only 22 years old, the vice captain is already among the best players in the AFL. A tall midfielder with long hair, he's hard to miss when watching the Dogs play and has a huge future ahead.

Recruit: Josh Schache #13

Schache is a young native Victorian who was traded to the Bulldogs from Brisbane at the end of 2017 after a few years of homesickness. A highly rated key forward who is yet to fully cash in on his potential, 2018 looms large for Schache (pronounced 'Shak-ey').

Cult Hero: Jason Johannisen #39

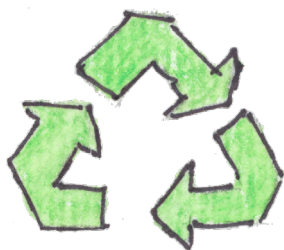
No one knew who JJ was until 2016, when he starred in the grand final and won the Norm Smith Medal for best on ground. He's now a star of the game, and continues to be leader on and off field at the Dogs.

Antagonist: Tom Liberatore #21

The son of Bulldogs legend and Brownlow medalist Tony Liberatore had a bright start to his career and is a good player, but has copped it from fans and coaches recently for partying too hard.

STATS AND STUFF

Show your knowledge of Hand-Egg/annoy your friends by memorising and reeling off these facts while watching the big game. *Note: Stats correct to the beginning of 2018.*



Recyclops

20 players on Carlton's 2018 list started their careers at other clubs – an AFL high which blows the league average of 10 out the water. Carlton has undergone a huge list turn-over since 2015, and has a particular liking for former GWS players. Sydney has just four recycled players on its list.



Retirement home

Adelaide has the oldest list in the competition, with an average age of 24 years and 192 days. Age doesn't necessarily mean experience – the second-oldest, Hawthorn (24y 179d) has the most players to have played 100 or more games, with 17 compared to the Crows' 14.



Nurseries

Gold Coast has the youngest list on average, at 23 years and 22 days. North Melbourne has a slightly older (23y 117d) but less experienced list – its players have played an average of 52 games, compared with the Suns' average of 53. St Kilda's list (23y 201d) also averages 53 games.



Sharpshooter: Of all the players in the league currently, Sydney's Lance Franklin has kicked the most career goals with 860 – the 10th most of all time. The overall goalkicking record belongs to Tony Lockett, who kicked 1360 goals for St Kilda and Sydney between 1983 and 2002.



Tall boi(s)

Aaron Sandilands has long been the AFL's tallest player at 211cm.

Collingwood's Mason Cox, who was recruited from the US in 2015, also stands at 211cm. Former Western Bulldog Peter Street was 210cm tall. No player taller than Sandilands and Cox has ever played AFL.



Short boi(s)

The AFL's shortest player is premiership Bulldog Caleb Daniel, who stands at 167cm. Daniel is one of the few in the league to wear a helmet when he plays at his mum's insistence.

Jim 'Nipper' Bradford is the shortest VFL/AFL player ever at 152cm, and he last played in 1949, so is unlikely to play again.



Pressure bois

The best young talent in the AFL fronts the draft at the end of each year. The first player picked is often subject to intense scrutiny, and the story of Port's Jack Watts is a cautionary one. Many of these players forge long careers, but some never meet the hype placed on them at age 17.

Drought-busters:

Richmond and the Western Bulldogs broke long premiership droughts in 2017 and 2016 respectively. Below are the longest remaining premiership droughts in the AFL.

Melbourne – 53 years
St Kilda – 51 years
Fremantle* – 23 years

Carlton – 22 years
Adelaide – 19 years

*Fremantle entered the AFL in 1995 and is yet to win a premiership



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